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DRAMA--TRAGEDY (OEDIPUS, MACBETH, GHOSTS), COMEDY (THE RIVALS, MAJOR BARBARA). LITERATURE CURRICULUM V, TEACHER AND STUDENT VERSIONS.

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TRAGIC AND COMIC FORMS OF DRAMA ARE EXPLORED IN THIS TWO-PART 11TH-GRADE LITERATURE UNIT. A SECTION ON TRAGEDY, TREATING THREE PLAYS, EMPHASIZES STRUCTURAL DIVISIONS, CONVENTIONS, AND SUBJECT MATTER PECULIAR TO THIS TYPE OF DRAMA. FOLLOWING A DISCUSSION OF THE CLASSICAL GREEK THEATRE AND THE ARISTOTELIAN VIEW OF TRAGEDY, THE FORM AND THEME OF "OEDIPUS THE KING" ARE ANALYZED. NOTES ON "MACBETH" ILLUSTRATE THE CONVENTIONS OF THE FIVE-ACT SHAKESPEAREAN PLAY AND EXPLICATE THE PLAY'S PLOT STRUCTURE, THEMATIC MOTIFS, POETRY, USE OF DRAMATIC IRONY, AND THE CAUSE-EFFECT MOTIVATIONS DICTATING TRAGIC ACTION. TO HELP MAKE MODERN TRAGEDY INTELLIGIBLE, SHAKESPEAREAN AND CLASSICAL GREEK TRAGEDIES ARE COMPARED TO IBSEN'S "GHOSTS," A TRAGEDY OF THE COMMON MAN. IN THE SECOND SECTION, THE NATURE OF COMEDY IS CONTRASTED WITH THE NATURE OF TRAGEDY, AND SHERIDAN'S "THE RIVALS" IS ANALYZED AS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF THE 18TH-CENTURY COMEDY OF MANNERS. IN ADDITION, SHAW'S "MAJOR BARBARA" IS TREATED FOR ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH DRAMA AND FOR ITS PRESENTATION OF CONTROVERSIAL IDEAS. A DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT AND STUDY QUESTIONS ARE PROVIDED FOR EACH PLAY. SEE ALSO ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160, ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832, TE 000 195 THROUGH TE 000 220, AND TE 000 227 THROUGH TE 000 249. (JB)

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DRAMA
Tragedy: *Oedipus, Macbeth, Ghosts*
Comedy: *The Rivals, Major Barbara*

Literature Curriculum V
Teacher Version

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

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LITERATURE CURRICULUM V

Oedipus

Teacher Version

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Text: Sophocles, Oedipus the King and Antigone, translated and edited by Peter D. Arnott (Appleton-Century Crofts, New York, 1950). $0.95

Oedipus

I. The Structure of Drama: A Brief Survey

During roughly the last half of the sixteenth century in England, the structuring of a play into five acts was a rather generally accepted convention. One can note, for example, such important pre-Shakespearean five-act plays as Nicholas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister (1550-1553), Norton and Sackville's Gorboduc (1562), George Peele's The Arraignment of Paris (1584), John Lyly's Endymion (1588), and the plays of Christopher Marlowe, the most important English dramatist before Shakespeare--The Jew of Malta (1589-1590), Temburlaine (1590), and Doctor Faustus (1588-1592). Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice (1596) and Julius Caesar (1599) obviously follow this convention of external dramatic structure.

Five-act structure is not, however, either the only or the best way to approach the study of dramatic form.

To begin with, let us consider the essential nature of what we call story. A story, whether true or fictional, is a causally related series of events progressing towards some specific end, some result; it usually attains this end after having passed through some sort of climax. A story can be true, an account of something which actually occurred; many good stories, exciting and highly suspenseful, have come out of the recent wars. But we are concerned with the story especially as a form of art, as something constructed, and, hence, artificial. In this sense there are several things a story is not. It is not a simple tale: the relating of one's excitement while skin-diving, the telling of one's adventures on a hunting trip. Such accounts lack progression, suspense, climax. Nor is the story a sketch, or an anecdote, or a simple incident--these also lack the necessary elements for a story. Of course stories can be constructed using such accounts, but as they stand they lack the necessary element of the artificer's molding hand.

Hence the nature of story.

The point we are getting at here is, put simply, this: story is the essential element of an extremely large variety of art forms--plays, novels, novelettes, short stories, fables, dramatic poetry, parables, fairy tales, narrative poetry, epics, detective stories, soap operas. Even musical comedies have a basic story, such as, for example, two boys trying to win the same girl. Even though the events--as superficially related as they may be--are interrupted by the singing of several dozen songs, there is still a story; at the end one of the boys has won the girl, and they go off into the sunset, singing, of course.

Any story (in the literary sense) has, as we have said, a definite structure, what we can call its structure of events. This events-structure formula comprises five steps:

1. Introduction: of characters, setting, atmosphere.
2. Definition: the problem of the story, sometimes called the "generating circumstance," since it is this problem which "generates" the story. We may also call this the "knot tying," this knot to be untied at the dénouement (literally, "untying of a knot"). Other terms are "initial impulse" and "exciting force."
3. Complication: the characters become further involved in the issue, which becomes itself more clearly confirmed.
4. Climax: or culmination, in which the opposing forces come to grips
5. Conclusion: the whole issue is finally resolved.

Of course, a certain latitude of definition is necessary, especially with regard to the Introduction, since sometimes principal characters and/or events are not introduced till quite late in the story.

The great utility of this structural formula is that it can be applied to any form of art having a story base--whether Aristotelian tragedy, Shakespearian comedy, or modern sociological drama. Hence it permits comparisons of plot structures, certainly a useful teaching technique. Perhaps more importantly, laying bare the structural bones of a play can be the firs step in approaching a difficult or complex drama; after having seized the essentials of the story, the student adds, so to speak, the flesh and blood of atmosphere, subtle motivation, attitude, characterization, etc.

The structure of the three tragedies studied in grade eleven is, of course, much more subtle than can be expressed simply by an analysis of their five parts. But for the time being we will use this structural formula as a means of reviewing briefly the dramatic structure of the two Shakespearian plays already studied, Julius Caesar and The Merchant of Venice. Then we will look at Oedipus the King both from this point of view and from that of the more complicated structure of Greek tragedy.

II. The Structure of Julius Caesar and The Merchant of Venice

A. Julius Caesar.

1. Introduction:
    a. atmosphere:
        --Caesar feared by tribunes but liked by commoners. (I, i)
        --soothsayer's warning (I, ii)
        --fierce storm and unnatural phenomena (I, iii)
    b. characters:
        --god-like Caesar and worshipful Antony (I, ii)
        --reluctant Cassius and Brutus (I, ii)
2. Definition: conspirators agree to murder Caesar but not Antony (II, i)

3. Complication:
   --murder of Caesar (III, i); populace is shocked.
   --Antony's eulogy before body of Caesar turns populace against conspirators (III, ii)
   --forces become aligned: Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus against Brutus, Cassius, and the other conspirators (IV, i, ii)

4. Climax: opposing forces meet, conspirators defeated, and Brutus kills himself (V, iii-v)

5. Conclusion: victors leave, "to part [share] the glories of this happy day." (V, v)

B. The Merchant of Venice.

1. Introduction:

   a. atmosphere:
      --Antonio and Bassanio concerned about love and money (I, i)
      --Portia disgusted with her suitors (I, ii)

   b. characters:
      --rich, generous Antonio and love-struck Bassanio
      --Portia and her father's caskets

2. Definition:
   --Antonio and Bassanio close the deal with Shylock (I, iii)
   --Jessica runs away from home with her father's jewels (II, vi)
   --Bassanio comes to try his luck with Portia's caskets (II, ix)

3. Complication:
   --Antonio's ships have been destroyed; hence his bond to Shylock is forfeit (III, i)
   --Bassanio opens the right casket and hence wins Portia (III, ii)

4. Climax: in court, seeking to collect his bond from Antonio, Shylock is thwarted by "Balthazar," and Antonio's life is saved (IV, i)

5. Conclusion:
   --Shylock loses all his wealth (IV, i)
   --the minor problem of the rings is cleared up, and all ends happily (V, i)

III. The Nature of Greek Drama

1. Background.

In studying Greek drama perhaps the first thing we must do is to set aside two modern ideas about drama: that it can deal with any kind of subject matter, and that performances, once begun, should be repeated until the public decides it has had enough. Greek tragedy was essentially religious in nature; the performances took place during the annual spring festival of Dionysus (later called Bacchus by the Romans), a god of wine and fertility. On three successive days during this festival three tragic poets, who had earlier been selected by competition, presented their plays. Each poet was assigned one day, and on that day he presented his three tragedies, which were considered parts of a unit. Oedipus, however, is an exception, since it was originally written as a separate play, complete in itself.

After all the plays had been performed, a winner was voted upon; he received a substantial cash prize and then celebrated by giving a large banquet for the members of the chorus and the actors.

2. Structure.

Classical Greek tragedies were performed without intermissions of any kind; there are, however, definite structural divisions in the plays, since they were composed according to a fairly rigid framework. The typical Greek tragedy has five principal elements; we will see later in Oedipus that variations of these result in eleven structural parts in all. The five major divisions are the following:

1. Prologue: the introductory scene, in which the background of the story is revealed.
2. Parodos: the first entrance of the Chorus, singing a song which has to do with the main theme of the play.
3. Episode: recitative dialogues between actors, with a minor role sometimes played by the Chorus. Somewhat resembles a scene in modern plays.
4. Stasimon: choral songs recited by the Chorus at the end of each episode.
5. Exodos: the final action, ended by the exit of all the players as the Chorus sings.

3. Chorus.

Although the use of the chorus varied from one playwright to another, generally the chorus can be said to represent the average citizen, the average spectator of the play. Its role was principally (although not always) that of the interested bystander, commenting upon the proceedings, asking questions, occasionally pointing out aspects of events which the principal characters might not have clearly seen, helping to interpret the significance and growth of the action.

Its attitude towards events is that of the average man, the conventional attitude expressed in conventional terms. Its comments serve as a kind of screen on which are reflected the hero's emotions and psychological states.

IV. *Oedipus*: Form

1. Introduction.

As the Greek scholar H.D.F. Kitto has pointed out (*Greek Tragedy*, 1954), the plot of *Oedipus* is of the kind which the Greek dramatists used commonly: "something unpleasant is predicted, the persons concerned try to avert it and think themselves safe, but in some natural though surprising fashion the prediction is fulfilled." The ancient legend which Sophocles adapted to the plot of the fulfilled prediction is summarized by Arnott in his introduction to the class text, pp. ix-x.

A note of explanation is necessary, however, concerning the riddle which the Sphinx asked of all Theban wayfarers. The riddle is explained by Robert Graves (*The Greek Myths*, 1955, vol. II) in this manner: "What being, with only one voice, has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?" Oedipus guessed the correct answer: "Man, because he crawls on all fours as an infant, stands firmly on his two feet in his youth, and leans upon a staff in his old age."

2. Structural Divisions of the Plot.

1) *Prologue* (lines 1-150):

Thebes has been ravaged by the plague, and hence the citizens have come to beg Oedipus to save them, he who had already saved the city from the Sphinx. For this same purpose Oedipus has already sent Creon, his wife's brother, to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, to find out what must be done. Creon returns with this oracle from Phoebus: the Thebans must find the murderers of Laius, former King of Thebes, and punish them; these murderers are still in the land. The only knowledge the Thebans have of the murder is that of one witness, who will say only that the murder was the work of many, not of one. Oedipus promises to find the murderer.

2) *Parados* (151-204):

In its song, the Chorus first expresses fear about what the [illegible] search will bring; then it bewails the plague and pestilence which have been visited upon Thebes; and at the end it implores the help of the gods. (It should be noted here that the stanzaic divisions of this choral ode--beginning with a strophe, then an antistrophe, then a strophe, etc.--are sung alternately by the Chorus, which divides itself in two for this purpose).

3) *First Episode* (205-452):

Before the assembled citizens Oedipus proclaims that anyone knowing who murdered Laius must make a full disclosure. He then curses the killer and any accomplices he may have. The Prophet Teiresias is brought before them, but he refuses to reveal what he knows until Oedipus charges him with having been an accomplice to the murder; then Teiresias accuses Oedipus of being the killer. Angrily, Oedipus in turn accuses Teiresias of having been put to this slander by Creon, who he supposes is trying to seize the throne. Teiresias leaves, after pronouncing a final prophecy about the eventual fate of the murderer.

4) First Stasimon (453-493):

The elders, fearful of the future, are nevertheless sure that Oedipus is innocent.

5) Second Episode (494-834):

Creon and Oedipus argue violently, culminating in the publicly expressed wish of Oedipus for Creon's death. Only after having listened to counsels advising moderation from Jocasta and the Chorus does Oedipus permit Creon to leave, but he now hates him. After listening to Oedipus' explanation of the accusation against Creon, Jocasta, in order to allay his fears, tells him of a prophecy made long ago; that a child born to her and Laius would kill his own father. But, she explains, Laius had abandoned the child in the mountains, and later had supposedly been killed in another land. Oedipus, alarmed by Jocasta's mention of three roads, questions her about the circumstances of the murder; everything confirms his fear that it was he who had unwittingly committed the deed. He tells her his story: his being raised as a prince in Corinth, the accusation that he was a bastard, his journey to Delphi and the horrible prophecy, his killing of several men at the crossing of three roads--exactly as Jocasta had described it. But Oedipus still has two hopes: the shepherd who saw the murder said it was accomplished by a group of men, not one; and according to the prophecy Laius was to die at the hands of Jocasta's son, but her son was killed while still a baby, having been abandoned on a mountain side. The shepherd is sent for.

6) Second Stasimon (835-876):

The Chorus's song has two points: it advocates humility, for the arrogant will be struck down; it prays that Zeus will look to these happenings, for man now "turns his face away from heaven."

7) Third Episode (877-1051):

A messenger from Corinth announces that Polybus, Oedipus' father, has died, and that the Corinthians desire Oedipus as their king. Hence Oedipus and Jocasta exult, because he has not killed his father, as oracle prophesied. But Oedipus still fears the other prophecy--union with his mother, Merope; hence he will never return to Corinth. On hearing this, the messenger reveals that Oedipus is not the son of Polybus; that a herdsman of Laius had found Oedipus, bound, on a mountain, and that he had given him to the messenger, who at that time was a shepherd; that the messenger had in turn given him to Polybus, who had no sons of his own. Oedipus must talk to this herdsman who, it turns out, is the same one who has already been sent for (ll. 737-738). Jocasta, fearing even more horrible revelations, pleads with Oedipus to go no further in his search; he replies "I must find out my birth." (1025)

8) Third Stasimon (1052-1071):

The Chorus, in a joyous song, prophesies that Oedipus will be found to be a native of this land, and it wonders if he is not descendedfrom the gods.

9) Fourth Episode (1072-1148):

The herdsman tells his story: it was indeed the messenger who had given him the child; the child was the son of Laius; it had been given to him by Jocasta, who feared a prophecy according to which "the son should kill his father." To Oedipus "now all is clear."

10) Fourth Stasimon (1149-1181):

The Chorus sings solemnly about the sorrows of life, about the life of Oedipus, "a life turned upside down."

11) Exodus (1182-1483):

A messenger relates that Jocasta has hung herself, and that Oedipus has put out his eyes so that he will no longer have to look upon his shame. The pitiful Oedipus is led forth; he bewails his grievous sins, and wishes that he had died while still a baby on Mount Cithairon; then he implores the elders of Thebes either to hide him in some wilderness or kill him. Oedipus begs unsuccessfully of Creon that he be killed, then implores that he be banished; but Creon will do nothing until he receives guidance from the oracle. Oedipus bids farewell to his children, indicating that they will suffer at the hands of society for the sins of their father.

3. Five-Part Structure.

We are introduced to the background of Oedipus' story in the first few pages of the play, and this background is continuously being filled in, bit by bit, almost to the Climax. Hence the Introduction is, to a more considerable extent here than in most plays, a substantial part of the whole play.

1) Introduction:

--plague, "the curse of heaven," has struck Thebes; the citizens have come to seek a remedy from Oedipus, "giant among men."

--Creon, sent to the shrine of Apollo by Oedipus to find out what must be done to save Thebes, reports what Phoebus has said: the murderers of King Laius, who are still in Thebes, must be found and punished.

2) Definition: Oedipus promises to find out the murderers.(135-141)

3) Complication:

--Teiresias, ordered to tell what he knows, accuses Oedipus of being the murderer, and prophesies that the murderer's fate will be terrible (342--ff.).

--Jocasta tells Oedipus of the prophecy once made to Laius (683--ff.), and Oedipus tells about his past life (743--ff.).

--Messenger reports that Polybus has died (899--ff.), and reveals that Oedipus was not adoptive son of Polybus (982--ff.).

4) Climax: confrontation of Oedipus with the truth (herdsman) (1104-1148)

5) Conclusion: Oedipus disgraced, his wife dead by her own hand, and his daughters to lead a life of shame.

This analysis of the structural elements of Oedipus is perhaps a bit misleading in that it may tend to leave the students with the impression that it is a very simple play. However, a consideration of the following plot elements will show that the structure of Oedipus is in reality quite complex.

1) the Theban herdsman had reported the place where the murder of Laius occurred; and Jocasta reveals the time of the murder, that it was really Laius who was killed, and the number of his retinue. All this evidence points to Oedipus as the slayer, and by line 726 Oedipus no longer has any doubts about it.

2) the messenger from Corinth provides much relief for Oedipus by revealing that he is not the son of Polybus and Merope, and hence has not committed parricide and incest. Hence the confidence of Oedipus (11. 1042--ff.). --in contrast to the despair of Jocasta, who has know the worst from 1. 1009.

3) these two elements converge when the Corinthian messenger and the Theban herdsman are brought face to face. Now it is revealed that whoever killed Laius also had committed parricide and incest.

4. Structural Improbabilities.

One last point needs to be made about the form of this play. Having looked at the plot both in considerable detail and from the vantage point of its five-part structure, we are more able to appreciate Samuel Taylor Coleridge's declaration that Oedipus has one of the three most perfect plots ever planned. But nevertheless there are some elements of the plot which are simply defective, although it should also be recognized that the audience, thoroughly engrossed in the spectacle unrolling before them, would probably not be aware of these defects--or perhaps a better term for them would be improbabilities. And we must also recognize that these improbabilities are not actually in the play, but rather are parts of the story before the time when the play itself actually begins.

Note, for example, Oedipus' ignorance about the story of his father, Laius. He does know the name of his predecessor on the Theban throne, and he also knows that this man had met a violent death, but he does not have any idea about where this death occurred, nor does he know that Laius was supposedly killed by robbers, or that one of his followers had escaped. Jocasta tells him the story of the oracle given to Laius, and Oedipus tells her about his own early life--this is in spite of their having been married for many years. This recticence about speaking openly to each other over such a long period somewhat exceeds the bounds of probability.

A further improbability is Jocasta's failure to take into account two clues to the mystery of Oedipus' identification which she has had before her for years: his name (which means, in Greek, "swollen-foot"), and the scars on his ankles, which he would certainly have borne all his life.

But the audience was watching a performance, not analyzing a text.

V. Oedipus: Point of View

It is impossible to say exactly what point of view Shakespeare adopted in either The Merchant of Venice or Julius Caesar. Was he displaying anti-Semitism? was he advocating republicanism instead of royalism? was he pronouncing himself against the historical Caesar and in favor of his assassins? was he inveighing against the sixteenth-century usurer? We can't say. But what we can say is that Shakespeare was an Elizabethan playwright who composed plays in an attempt to please an audience of Englishmen at the end of that century. Nor can we say, with any reasonable assurance of being correct, that any one character represents Shakespeare personally. It is tempting to say that Brutus was really a Romanized Shakespeare, but then Brutus was a murderer. Substitution of any other character from these plays for Shakespeare is even less satisfying.

But the case is different with Oedipus. As we have already seen in the discussion of the background of Greek drama, plays at that time were essentially of a religious character. Hence we can expect that the playwright had a definite point of view towards his story, and that, since his attitude had to be easily discernible to an audience seeing the play performed only once, this point of view should be, at least, clear to those studying the play closely.

The controlling element of the story is the prophecy. It is, of course, a "religious" prophecy, having come from the shrine of Apollo and controlling Oedipus' relation to his ultimate destiny. And within this framework the author's point of view is further restricted by several factors. Let us note them in outline.

1) The play focuses on a single character, Oedipus. It does not focus on Jocasta, as it might well have.

2) The Greek poet was regarded as a teacher, whose function, as Arnott comments (class text, p. vii) "was not merely to entertain but to provide his audiences with matter for reflection. Thus tragedy, while taking its subjects from a body of familiar stories, employs these stories as a framework within which to treat pertinent moral problems." The moral problem in question here will be dealt with later.

3) The play deals with the present, but the background of the story is alluded to time and again--it is constantly kept before us.

4) The concept of justice. To the objection that a man has been horribly punished for having acted as he best saw fit, it can be replied that the prophecy did not force Oedipus to kill his father; the killing was an act of his doing--"I lost my temper" (l. 778). And furthermore his marriage to a much older woman was also an act he committed freely.

5) Irony. Oedipus had undertaken his journey from Corinth to Thebes because of the oracle; he had to separate himself from Polybus. But while travelling to Thebes he killed Laius. As the play begins, Oedipus is informed that only if the murderer of Laius is punished will the plague afflicting his city be lifted.

> My solemn curse
> Is on the killer, whether he is hiding
> In lonely guilt or has accomplices.
> May he reap the harm he sowed, and die unblest.
> And what is more, I pray that if this man
> Should live among my household with my knowledge,
> The curse I swore just now should fall on me. (234-240)

This is the key point of irony in the play--Oedipus condemning the murderer and hence condemning himself.

The audience realizes, of course, what the irony is, since Greek dramatists usually constructed their plays on the basis of well-known stories.

A few more ironic elements, some of many:

a) Jocasta tells Oedipus about the prophecy made to Laius, about how their child would kill his father, but that Laius reportedly had been killed by bandits, and their son had been abandoned on a mountain; and then she adds: "So much for oracles which map our future." (l. 695)

b) Jocasta tells the Elders she desires to pay a visit to the shrines to request a favor from the gods: "Show us how we can find a clean way out," she asks (l. 887). Soon after she has hanged herself.

c) Oedipus: "The man whose hand killed Laius might some time
Feel a desire to do the same to me,
And so by avenging him I protect myself." (ll. 139-141)

d) It is Oedipus, more than anyone else in the play, who sees to the accumulating of the evidence which finally damns him.

VI. Oedipus: Theme

A. Oedipus and the Critics.

Arriving at a complete and satisfactory interpretation of the meaning of this play may not be possible. More than 2,400 years after it was first produced the critics still debate the meaning of the essential truths of this short, apparently simple tragedy. Let us look briefly at what some of them say.

1) C. M. Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy (1945)
Bowra believes that Oedipus is a great man who is undeservedly humbled by the gods. The gods display their power simply because they want to, not because Oedipus has been insolent to them or because of any fault of his judgment or character. The lesson of the play is that prosperous men must be modest, or the gods will destroy their prosperity. The warning of the gods is not so much against man's pride as it is against his having any confidence or sense of security; to emphasize this warning they have made an example of Oedipus. He has been chosen from the outset as an example that the successful man must also be modest.

2) Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, Understanding Drama (1948).
These critics state that the principal point of this tragedy is that in real life men do not experience poetic justice--getting what they deserve--since the punishment inflicted upon Oedipus is more severe than his actions justly call for. Sophocles did not write Oedipus on a thesis he thought should be true but rather on what he saw actually occurring in life.

3) Cedric H. Whitman, Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism (1951).
Popular belief was, according to Whitman, that the gods punished Oedipus because they hated him and because of what he had done. But Sophocles has described Oedipus as a man both innocent in act and honest in motive; he also strove

vigorously to be great. Hence Sophocles could not have agreed with the judgment of the gods. Oedipus has free will, and it is his acting freely which is the impetus of the play. The gods have prophesied the fall of Oedipus, they have not willed it. Oedipus has charged that the gods are responsible for what has occurred to him, but this means no more than that they permit life to turn out as it is.

B. Oedipus and the Students.

In spite of such critical differences and contradictions, and keeping in mind (as yet another critic has put it) that each reader must come to his own conclusions about this play, we can look briefly at some of the principal thematic developments without necessarily having to arrive at any definite interpretation.

1) The character of Oedipus:

--a tyrant, but a benevolent one. The people have great love for their saviour: Priest: "This country now remembers
Your former zeal, and hails you as her saviour." (11. 47-48)

--he is a man, not a god, but a "giant among men." (1. 40)

--stubbornness is important in his character, but it is a stubbornness balanced by persistence. Having found out some of the truth about who he is, he persists in going on to the end, even though it appears that it may be fatal to him, and even though Jocasta implores him to go no further in this search:
"I have the clues
Here in my hand. I must find out my birth." (11. 1024-1025)
"No-one could stop me finding out the truth." (1. 1031)

--he is impatient and quick-tempered. Old, blind, wise Teiresias, reluctant to tell what he knows, is immediately berated by Oedipus--"you old reprobate," "traitor"--and then Oedipus savagely and stupidly accuses him of having been behind the plot to kill Laius. Then Teiresias having imparted his knowledge, Oedipus immediately jumps to the conclusion that "Creon, my earliest friend, / Yearns to depose me, plots behind my back." (11. 374-375).

--face to face with Creon, Oedipus replies to his "learn the facts and then pass judgment" with "I have no inclination/ To learn from you, my bitter enemy." (11. 526-527) The Chorus' reasonable advice to him that "hasty thoughts are dangerous" (1. 599) has no effect.

--he is, above all else, a great man; his nobility and strength of character, his complete honesty towards himself and others mark him as one of that class which includes Brutus, Lear, King Arthur, Odysseus. He is able both to face the truth about himself and, that known, to inflict upon himself the most cruel afflictions as penance for his sins. As Arnott puts it, "the tragedy of Oedipus is thus a hymn to man, who for all his limitations and propensities to error still possesses a grandeur which is all his own and owes nothing to the gods." (class text, p. xiii)

2) Jocasta:

--appears, at first, to be of very strong character--her no-nonsense manner of stopping the argument between Oedipus and Creon:

"Have you both gone out of your minds?
What is the sense
Of bandying insults? Are you not ashamed....?" (11.615-616)

--but when the facts about Oedipus' life are about to be revealed she refuses to face up to the truth: "I pray you may never find out who you are." (1. 1034) A few minutes later she hangs herself.

C. Oedipus as Tragic Hero.

In concluding this discussion of the theme of Oedipus, we will take a brief look at the theory of the nature of the tragic hero, as the Greeks saw him, and then see to what extent Sophocles adhered to this theory, consciously or not.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), in his Poetics, discusses the nature of Greek tragedy and compares it to such other forms of poetry as comedy and the epic. Although written nearly one hundred years after the greatest of the Greek tragedians had died, Aristotle's work is invaluable because it is the only critical study of Greek drama to have been written by someone who was close to the period.

The Poetics has been the subject of criticism and interpretation for hundreds of years, criticism notable especially for its enormous mass, its complexity, and its contradictions. The contradictions result especially from Aristotle's having failed to explain clearly enough (at least for those who followed him) precisely what he meant by some of his terms. However, in discussing Greek tragedy one cannot bypass Aristotle. Here, then, is a brief presentation of those parts of the Poetics most relevant to our study of Greek tragedy, with some additional (tentative) notes in an attempt to both clarify and make relevant.

1) Tragedy and Catharsis.

"Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." (The Poetics of Aristotle, ed. Butcher, 1902) This catharsis (i.e. purging) of emotions was, then, the aim of Greek tragedy. The spectators had both fear and pity aroused in them by the tragic spectacle played before them; but they were also purged of these emotions; hence they left the theatre feeling morally and emotionally cleansed.

The key to the theory of catharsis is that there is an identification made, usually near the beginning of the play, between the tragic hero and the audience. We see in the first lines of Oedipus that the tragic hero is a man, a great man, to be sure, but a man nevertheless; and hence what can happen to one man can, conceivably, happen to another, any other; and hence the audience will feel pity and horror, not because they feel that they could also be great kings and be the subject of prophecies, but because they too, innocent of deliberate wrong-doing and innocent of intention, could also be struck down by fate for no apparent reason. For, as Aristotle put it, "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves."

2) Plot.

"Most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character." (Butcher edn., 1902)

We have already discussed in this unit both plot and character. We saw that the plot is a highly complex, detailed structure; one must read it and reread it, closely, attentively, in order to seize all its ramifications. Character, on the other hand, is of less importance. The only person whose character receives anything like a full delineation is of course Oedipus. Jocasta and Creon receive a much less complete treatment, and we know almost nothing about any of the others except what is essential to the furtherance of the plot. With regard to the delineation of secondary characters like Jocasta and Creon, we might compare the knowledge we have of their characters to what we know about secondary characters in other plays, for example Cassius in Julius Caesar, Antonio in The Merchant of Venice, Macduff in Macbeth.

3) The Tragic Hero and Hamartia.

The Greek tragic hero is not a perfectly good man, nor is he a complete villain. His character is, as Aristotle puts it, "that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous,--a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families." (Butcher edn., 1951)

Aristotle's hamartia ("error or frailty"--cf. above) has often been misinterpreted into the now-famous expression "tragic flaw," referring to that aspect of the tragic hero's character, that personal fault, which causes him to act as he does and, as a consequence, inevitably to bring about his own downfall. To the Greeks the worse kind of error, or hamartia, was pride, overweening confidence in one's own powers; they called it hubris, or hybris.

It is true that Oedipus' misfortunes are brought about to some extent by his quick-tempered killing of Laius. But it must also be remembered, in his defense, that Laius struck the first blow: "And brought his double goad down on my head" (1. 781). The essential point, however, about Oedipus as tragic hero is that he is wellintentioned, his objectives are always good, he has no vice in which he deliberately indulges; his quick temper, we feel, is something he has considerable difficulty in controlling. But though he is honest, he is not perfect: like all men, he is flawed. Aristotle said that the tragic hero "is not eminently good and just"; note the adverb.

What, in the final analysis, can we say of Oedipus' _hamartia_? The critics have all sorts of answers. Arnott says quite unequivocally that "his weakness, his 'fatal flaw,' is his belief that the human intellect is sufficient to itself." (class text, p. xii) W.H. Auden, in his essay "The Christian Tragic Hero" (1945), feels that Oedipus is right in wishing to avoid the prophecy, that he does not and should not feel any guilt after he has killed the old man, and that his marriage to Jocasta is normal. Guilt begins only after he finds out that the man he killed was his father and the woman he married is his mother. Auden goes on to say that "what had to happen happened"; he was punished for a _hubris_ which was part of him before he had ever heard of the prophecy--"had he not had such a character, the prophecy would never have been made." J.H. Letters (_The Life and Work of Sophocles_, 1953), says simply that, although Oedipus was not a perfect man, "within the scope of the play he is certainly an innocent one." Oedipus tried hard to escape his fate, but he could not.

As has already been suggested, perhaps each reader should come to his own conclusion, assuming, of course, that it will be based on a thorough knowledge of the text and some understanding of the background.

VII. Conclusion

The failure of Oedipus is the failure to know himself. Oedipus does not know who he is, he does not know who his parents were, he does not know how he came to be with his adoptive parents, he does not know why the oracle prophesied as it did, he does not know who it was he killed on the road, he does not know who his wife is, and finally, as the crowning touch of irony, he does not know who is the murderer of Laius.

An interesting contrast to Oedipus is Macbeth. Macbeth most certainly does know who he is, he does know the composition of his own nature, he does know accurately his motives--his greed, his ambition. He does not, as Oedipus does not, know the wherefore of the prophecy (in his case, of course, coming from the three witches); but he struggles viciously to see to it that the prophecies will be accomplished. Oedipus, on the other hand, left Corinth in mortal fear in an attempt to prevent the accomplishment of the prophecies. The two wives are remarkably similar; they are both strong women at the beginning, especially Lady Macbeth. But neither one proves strong enough to see things through to the end: Jocasta dies by her own hand, overwhelmed by grief; Lady Macbeth dies insane, a state brought about by the series of horrid events of which she was at least in part the instigator.

We may say, in the final analysis, that Macbeth dies, fully cognizant of his own nature and of his state in life, as a result of events brought about by his consciously and deliberately trying to achieve happiness by evil means. Oedipus, however, rises above his condemnation to the life of a blind exile; he strongly proclaims his individuality, his strength of spirit. His last words are understandably bitter, but they also reveal both his inner strength and his newly acquired self-knowledge, that knowledge for which he had searched so hardily. He tells the Chorus

> "Do not tell me I am wrong. What I have done
> Is best as it is."

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LITERATURE CURRICULUM V

Macbeth

Teacher Version

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Teacher Version

Macbeth

I. King Oedipus, Macbeth, and Ghosts

In comparing and contrasting these three tragedies it should be made clear at the start that we shall not be talking about "influences": it is certain as anything can be that Shakespeare had no direct knowledge of Greek tragedy nor of Aristotle's Poetics; and while of course Ibsen knew both Sophocles and Shakespeare, his association with them in this cluster of tragedies is interesting chiefly as a way of showing how a great dramatist "coerced" the conventions and methods of a genre in order to make his work speak as directly as possible to his community, his European audience. We shall be concerned primarily, then, with two teaching intentions. First, we wish to show what the three tragedies may have in common: in terms of structure and certain other conventions of the genre; and in terms of something that may as well be called the tragic vision of life (which may be found also in much non-dramatic literature--e.g., Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, read in the ninth grade). Second, we shall try to get our students to be equally aware of differences; partly to lead them to some elementary knowledge of how different eras have quite different world-views, and how these world-views are reflected in literature in different approaches to similar if not the same human problems; and partly because the discovery of differences is a discovery of the uniqueness of the individual work. We may repeat here Austin Warren's statement quoted in our introduction to Modes and Genres: "Man's pleasure in a literary work is compounded of the sense of novelty and the sense of recognition."

We turn, then, from King Oedipus to Macbeth

First, something simple and obvious. Although it was the Elizabethans' knowledge of the Roman plays of Seneca and Plautus and Terence, either directly in the schools or through early English adaptations, that established the five-act convention in Shakespeare's theater, the ultimate origin of this structure, the "external form," is to be found in the Greeks. King Oedipus begins with a prologue, dialogue first between Oedipus and the Priest of Zeus, then Oedipus and Creon, an opening which is an example of dramatic exposition--it sets the scene, reminds the audience of some of the events that have gone before, and plants the seed from which the following action is to grow ("As once erewhile / Thy lucky star gave us prosperity, / Be the same man today"). Then the chorus enters, chanting or singing its first ode, and thereafter we are given five "episodes," marked apart by the regularly recurring choral songs and concluding with exit ode. We cannot be sure why the structural idea of five presented itself to the Greeks. May it have been because the odd number suggested the idea of a fulcrum at the center, enforcing the principle of the tragic seesaw, first up, as it seems, then down, both movements seen ironically against the background of a possible balance? However that may be, the chorus, although it had other functions, also served as a kind of poetic curtain separating the episodes, and the choruses of Seneca and the English adaptations had only this function. Shakespeare's Henry V has come down to us with all the choral curtains intact; two survive (as minor nuisances) in Romeo and Juliet. It is probable that he provided none for the plays of his mature period, deliberately rejected such emphatic punctuations. As we observed in dealing with The Merchant of Venice and Julius Caesar, Shakespeare's structural rhythms tend often to carry across the act divisions. His structural principles were not mechanical but organic. And in the Greek play as well it is the tragic idea worked out in the ironic action that provides the real principle of organization, the tragic form.

Other matters are more interesting and make better occasions for fruitful discussion--for instance, the similarity-with-differences in the manifestations of "Fate" and the agencies of Fate in the two plays. Although in the Athens of Pericles the traditional Greek religious system was being subjected to skeptical erosion and rational revisions (and the playwrights were among the radical revisers), the idea of Fate as a fixed principle (of which the Gods acted as divine instruments) determining human destinies still had great imaginative power. Its spokesman in King Oedipus is the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, consulted by the father of Oedipus before the play begins and by Creon at the command of Oedipus within the play. The truths announced by the oracle are sometimes only partial, nothing but the truth but not the whole truth (why couldn't the divine oracle have revealed to Creon the identity of the slayer of Laius?), and nearly always the tragic hero tries to evade or oppose them, but they always turn out to be true. Another kind of quasi-divine agency in King Oedipus is the Sphinx, a more whimsical creature, suggesting with her woman-lion appearance not so much the super- as the un-natural, who speaks in riddles which the mortal must answer correctly or be destroyed. Do such forces and agencies appear in Shakespeare? If so, with what differences?

They do appear, of course. In many of the tragedies the idea of fate is figured in the conventional metaphor of the stars (Romeo and Juliet are "star-crossed" lovers, and at the end Romeo expresses his belief at least in the "yoke of inauspicious stars" as the cause of his tragedy), but the stars have no clear spokesmen, since astrologers do not appear in Shakespeare's casts of characters. The soothsayer in Julius Caesar does of course seem to exercise the oracular function. Significantly, however, the "stars" in that play appear chiefly to raise a question: is it the stars or character that determines human destiny ("The fault, dear Brutus. . .")? The uncertain seesaw between fate and individual will enter into the pattern of Shakespearian ambiguity.

If there is a convention in Shakespeare's dramatic practice that may seem faintly to resemble the oracular warnings of Sophocles (aside of course from Caesar's soothsayer) it is the natural (or un-natural) omen, the prodigies that precede the assassination of Caesar; but such omens never speak plainly, so that men may "construe" them "clean from the purpose of the things themselves" or may treat them with blunt skepticism, as Hotspur does the superstition of Owen Glendower. Or, like the dark day and the "mousing owl" that kills the falcon at the time of the murder of Duncan in Macbeth, they may appear not as omens at all but as manifestations of a nature riven and disordered by a crime already committed, having only symbolic function. The purposes of fate in the Shakespearian world seem always hopelessly obscure, leaving us only with Brutus' "fatalistic" truth:

> O that a man might know
> The end of this day's business ere it come!
> But it sufficeth that the day will end,
> And then the end is known.

It is sure only that what finally will happen will be tragically different from what the hero has intended--true enough, of course, of Oedipus, but he at least had been *told*--told before leaving Corinth, the *reason* for his leaving Corinth. So the Shakespearian contrast may suggest that Sophocles' riddling Sphinx is symbolically closer to the Shakespearian tragic vision than is the Delphian oracle. The riddling prophecies of Macbeth's witches, at once true and not true, offer an instructive analogy. But Shakespeare's actual use of such devices serves primarily to emphasize the vast differences that separate his world from that of the Greek.

The tragic hero, then; whether victim of fate, of riddling chance, or of himself. The Sophoclean hero (and especially Oedipus) has come down to us filtered through the observations of Aristotle, tortured as it were through the centuries by devious applications of the "flaw" almost beyond anything he actually suffers in the play. It is, one supposes, understandable, and might have happened if Aristotle had never written the *Poetics*; for the black pessimism that always threatens in the greatest tragedies ("I call *no* mortal happy, while he holds his house of clay") is intolerable to tender minds, so that we feel compelled to try to find some kind of justice in the catastrophe. It is comforting to think the hero got what was coming to him, hard to face the possibility that "there but for the Grace of God go I." If we can find a "flaw," then, that of course is not in *us*, we can believe that there is a kind of criminal justice in the nature of things. However, although such a pleasant circumstance may allow us to feel a kind of pity for the victim, it is surely not the pity that in Aristotle "is aroused by *unmerited* misfortune," and certainly it does not occasion the fear or terror that is aroused when it is "the misfortune of a man like ourselves" (*Poetics*, section XIII).

But let our students try to arrive at conclusions for themselves, pose for them the difficult questions. Is Oedipus a good *monarch*, according to the evidence of the play? Wouldn't he seem to be? He tries with admirable stubbornness to liberate his people from the curse of sterility that has fallen upon them. Does he succeed? Presumably. He finds the "cause" and ruthlessly removes it. Is he a good *man*? He is proud, suspicious, and dreadfully quick-tempered (but he is subjected to intolerable stresses); yet he also cleaves to his duty, seeks counsel, loves--a homely touch--his daughters, and, when his fate is clear to him, bows to it. How then is he flawed? Because, before the play begins, he has tried to evade the oracular prophecy, just as his father before him tried to evade his doom? Flawed also by, paradoxically (the paradox of tragedy called irony), his very strength? There are no easy answers to such questions. But is it not clear that, as men and monarchs go, Oedipus is a "good" man, a "good" monarch?

What, now, about the Shakespearian tragic hero?

To begin with, there was in the sixteenth century some uncertainty about the meaning of the word tragedy, and at times it was used in the comparatively simply medieval sense: a narrative in which the hero falls from "prosperity" into misery. So Richard III, whose hero was an unmitigated villain who announces himself as such in the soliloquy that opens the play, was entitled in the Folio The Tragedy of Richard III. But, presumably since the circumstances of our existence and the nature of human intelligence and the individual will do not themselves change much from era to era, the tragic hero in Elizabethan drama soon took on some of the qualities of "goodness" that he has in the Greek plays. They are present in the Brutus of Julius Caesar. In discussing that hero last year, students may have been led to see that Brutus has a certain unconscious (Shakespeare was conscious of it--he put it there) talent for self-deception; but his honor, although the word is played on ironically, is nevertheless clear; the torture he suffers in arriving at his fatal decision is obvious (the torture of a good man who recognizes the debt of loyalty he owes Caesar), and his idealistic devotion to Rome at least resembles the political responsibility assumed by Oedipus for Thebes. He is also a "good" husband (although perhaps a little cold). So, at the end, we may believe Antony when he affirms the selflessness of Brutus, may believe that he was the "noblest Roman of them all." In other words, the character of Brutus is evidence that an English tragic "convention" was developing more or less along Sophoclean lines, with one of its "imperatives" the proposition that the hero be a good man and that his tragic punishment at the end, although there may be a kind of "logic" in it, is surely greater than the hero deserves. "There but for the Grace of God go I"--the Grace of God in both the case of Oedipus and Brutus perhaps meaning in part God's particular benevolence in not giving us such responsibilities, not endowing us with the greatness that until the nineteenth century was also an essential element in the tragic hero convention. We shall see how Ibsen was to change that conventional trait. Mrs. Alving and Oswald are indeed "like us": the tragic terror is sharper, perhaps, because of their very ordinariness, expressed in the deadly ordinariness of the prose they were made to speak. In dealing with Macbeth we shall see how the convention of poetic speech enters into the tragic emotion.

And Macbeth and the convention of the good man tragically brought low? We shall see about that.

Finally, the convention of tragic irony. How it specifically manifests itself in King Oedipus has already been sufficiently shown in the class discussions of that play. Fundamental to it in both Sophoclean and Shakespearian tragedy is the condition that playwright and audience share an advance knowledge about the hero's whole story that the hero himself cannot have. Tragic irony is made possible, in other words, by an aspect of the development of genre conventions discussed in our year's introduction to genre study: a circumstance in the accepted playwright audience pact, a clause in the artistic contract, that the plots of tragedies should be familiar ones, whether they were taken from myth or from chronicle history or popular story, so that although Brutus cannot know the end until the "day" is ended, the audience does. So when he decides to kill Caesar in order to save the Republic and unify Rome, we know that the opposite will happen and stand aghast at the double meaning of speech after speech. Tragic irony is a literary device or convention, then,that seems to issue naturally from the philosophical awareness of the enigmatic quality of fate or destiny and the vast discrepancy between what men intend and the actual results of their intentions. An aspect of style, in other words, issues from, almost becomes one with, an aspect of human experience, of life. Yes: Literature is a Life Experience. The experience is its Form.

II. Macbeth and the Genre "Tragedy"

In turning from the study of King Oedipus to the study of Macbeth, one might begin with some guide-line questions suggested by the foregoing discussion, and then proceed to some observations and questions on the problems of genre or form, our junior-year emphasis. In the classroom it might go something like this:

> "In reading and discussing the introduction to this year's work (Literature Curriculum V, 'Introduction to the Student'), you considered some of the broad differences of form and effect between the Modes called fiction, poetry, drama, and non-fiction--especially as they appeared in Auden's poem "O Where Are You Going?" and the one-act 'play' it was turned into, with its flow of spoken dialogue, its use of scenery, of furniture and props, etc. (In this connection it is interesting that Shakespeare in writing Macbeth reversed this process. He turned a prose narrative on the same subject written by an early historian named Holinshed into a play.) Certainly these differences are marked, and knowing about the differences increases our pleasure in reading examples of all the different Modes or kinds. However, there are also some remarkable differences between examples of the same Mode. Although the terms may not be awfully important, sometimes the French word genre is used for the different sub-kinds or sub-modes. For instance, Comedy is one genre belonging to the mode Drama, and Tragedy another, and Melodrama another, and so on. We need to pay considerable attention to the differences between the genres because it helps us to know how to take them. The first obvious difference between Comedy and Tragedy of course is that a comedy like The Merchant of Venice ends happily (when you read The Merchant in the ninth grade, did some of you think there were some tragic elements in it?), and tragedies like Julius Caesar and Macbeth end unhappily. But even this obvious difference may not always be very satisfactory. I wonder when you have finished reading Macbeth whether some of you will really feel that it has an unhappy ending. Then you will go on to read a tragedy called

> Ghosts by the nineteenth-century playwright Henrik Ibsen. It meets the tragic requirement of the unhappy ending certainly! But how is it different from these other earlier tragedies? Having read the Greek tragedy Kind Oedipus, two of Shakespeare's tragedies, and finally Ibsen's Ghosts, you may decide that even among the plays that are called "tragedies" there are such remarkable differences of treatment and effect and interest that the word "tragedy" is useful only as a kind of tag. But there are nevertheless similarities among them, and the similarities and differences are important."

It is in the interest of inviting this kind of speculative discussion that we decided to emphasize problems of genre in the junior year, when students have done enough reading in common to make comparison and contrast possible.

III. Macbeth as Tragic Hero

In "Literature Curriculum V--Introduction to the Student," students were told that once an author has chosen his form it "imposes rules on him which permit him to do some things but which also forbid him to do others." This of course is true. But the greatest authors find ways of at least modifying the "rules" if not actually breaking them, in the interest or originality and freshness of vision. In the "Teacher Version" of the Introduction to the junior year we quoted Norman Holmes Pearson, who uses the word "imperatives" instead of "rules" (or "conventions"), and says: "forms may be regarded as institutional imperatives which both coerce and are in turn coerced by the writer." How in Macbeth does Shakespeare coerce the tragic "imperatives," how does he modify the conventions or rules of his genre?

The most startling single fact about Macbeth is that when we ask about him the questions we have asked about Oedipus and Brutus, Is he a good man or good monarch? the answers surely must be an unequivocal no in both instances--if we look, unmoved, at the facts. This is how Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch summarized those "facts": Shakespeare

> made this man, a sworn soldier, murder Duncan, his liege-lord.
>
> He made this man, a host, murder Duncan a guest within his gates.
>
> He made this man, strong and hale, murder Duncan, old, weak, asleep and defenceless.
>
> He made this man commit murder for nothing but his own advancement.
>
> He made this man murder Duncan, who had steadily advanced him hitherto, who had never been aught but trustful, and who (that no detail of approach might be wanting) had that very night, as he retired, sent, in most kindly though, the gift of a diamond to his hostess.

> To sum up: instead of extenuating Macbeth's criminality, Shakespeare doubles and redoubles it.
>
> --Shakespeare's Workmanship, 1918

And redoubles it. The murder of Duncan is followed immediately by the murder of the grooms, innocent of everything except drunkenness; then the murder of his friend Banquo, a true man ("In the great hand of God I stand"); he slanders first the grooms and then Malcolm--deadly slander indeed; he sets up a spy system in his kingdom ("There's not a one of them but in his house / I keep a servant fee'd); he re-enacts the Murder of the Innocents in the senseless slaying of Lady Macduff and her son; and, finally, slaughter spreads throughout the kingdom ("Each new morn / New widows howl, new orphans cry ..."). If the tragic pity is aroused only by "unmerited misfortune," is pity for Macbeth in any way possible? And fear because of the misfortune of "one like ourselves"?--if we feel fear in this fashion, surely we are marked for the gallows. And, finally, doesn't the retribution that falls upon "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen" in the fifth act, with the concluding promise of the restoration of order and justice in Scotland, really constitute a happy ending? If we think not, surely we must be depraved. Shouldn't the play perhaps then be called a Comedy after all, somewhat resembling Dante's poem in its progress?

IV. Macbeth and the Christian World-View

The medieval Christian reference may be useful in helping to get us inside the play, perhaps even in helping to understand why, instead of simply appalling us, Macbeth does deeply move us, does even inspire a most human pity (for of course he does). There is much in the play to support the view that its narrative re-enacts with variations the ancient Eden story of the Temptation and the Fall, and with the New Testament Redemption sequel; that this play is Christian in a way that Julius Caesar (sensibly enough) decidedly is not. If so, we may then say that the tragic "imperatives" of the conventional tragic hero are here "coerced" by Shakespeare with the help of the inherited Christian tradition, the "social circumstance" thus contributing to the genre and its conventions (see "Orientation: Modes and Genres," 3-C). Such an approach may also be used to enforce a reminder that the roots of both Greek and English drama were firmly sunk in the different religious beliefs and rituals of the two cultures; and that although English drama had undergone an almost total transformation in moving from the church porch and clergy to the marketplace and the guilds, and from the marketplace to the schools and the schoolmen, and from the schools to the popular theater and paying customers of Shakespeare's day, the Christian attitudes and symbols, in spite of the beginnings of skeptical reaction in the late sixteenth century , were still almost as they had been. Christianity was in a way of speaking a deeply-conditioned idiom in the whole complex instinctive process of communication, formal and informal. "I could not say 'Amen!' / When they did say 'God bless us!'" They had said it stirring in their sleep.

The Christian approach to Macbeth may go something like this. In the beginning the Hero is a good man, although Scotland with its foul and murky air of the first scenes is hardly Eden and Macbeth's guilty response to the witches' salutation makes it clear that the potential Evil is already in him (as, according to theology, it is in us all). However, as Duncan's great and valiant captain, "brave Macbeth" has it in him also to be a soldier of the Lord, the sworn enemy of traitors within the Kingdom (Satan of course is the Arch-Traitor).

The shift of the action to Macbeth's castle at Inverness seems to put behind us the fair-and-foul atmosphere of the first scenes, and Banquo's poetic language makes a kind of Eden of the scene--the swallow, "the temple-haunting martlet, does approve / By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath / Smells wooingly here." But it is an ironic illusion, only one of the many appearance-reality contradictions that rend the world of the play--fair is still only seeming-fair. Already, withing the castle, the Temptress has urged the Hero to assume the Serpent's disguise--"look like the innocent flower, / But *be* the serpent under't"--we hardly need the porter's grim fun with the castle door as Hell-gate to make the point.

Lady Macbeth hates, as in the tradition she must, the *goodness* in Macbeth--"What thou would'st highly, / That would'st thou *holily,*" she says scornfully. Like Dr. Faustus, Macbeth is torn between his good angel, Duncan, who "Hath borne his faculties so meek. . . that his virtues / Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against / The deep damnation of his taking off," and who has promised Macbeth continuing life--"I. . . will labor to make thee full of growing"; and the bad angel who is his profane love, his "dearest partner of greatness." Struggling between them, he wavers: "We will proceed no further in this business." But the fatal woman pours her spirits in his ear, more poisonous than the "juice of cursed hebona" which that Cain, Claudius, drops into the ear of his brother Hamlet, for it is the *soul* this poison destroys. This seventh scene of Act I is the great Fall scene, and the process is appallingly swift. "*I am settled,*" the Hero says at the end of it, reminding us perhaps of the fatal opening line of Brutus' first soliloquy in the orchard--"It must be by his death." But with how great a difference. *This* fall is the Fall of Man; that other only the fall of Brutus. Thus does Shakespeare constantly transform even his own motifs, conventions.

The killing of Duncan is the murder of a saint, one of the Lord's chosen. "Thy royal father," Macduff is to say later to Malcolm, "was a most sainted king." So it is that in Act II, Scene 3 (also in Macduff's words--he seems to speak a kind of *choral commentary*),

> Confusion now hath made his masterpiece:
> Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
> The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
> The life o' the building!

And Macbeth, describing his own bloody work a little later, falls as it were unconsciously into the imagery of stylized iconography--"Here lay Duncan, / His silver skin laced with his golden blood. . ." It is grandly audacious, that speech: audaciously great acting by the Hero, grand audacity in the playwright in endowing his spiritually blind protagonist with that poetic boldness.

The good angel is dead, but seems to live for a while as the surviving conscience that tortures Macbeth with "the affliction of these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly," and with the accusing ghost of Banquo when he appears at what would seem to be Macbeth's coronation banquet ("Thou has it now--King, Cawdor, Glamis, All"). But "hard use," as he says at the end of that scene, will give conscience the coup de grâce, and after that feast scene the good angel does not stir in him. What we are given thereafter is the swift progress of the disease of spiritual callousness, a dramatic history of damnation, with the only torture left at the end an overwhelming life-weariness coupled with the desolate awareness, not that he has cut himself off from God (at the very beginning he has said that he would "jump the life to come"), but that he has cut himself off from men, the human brotherhood:

> I have lived long enough. My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not hope to have . . .

But the tragedy's counter-action, the process of redemption, not of Macbeth, who "must not hope," but of the Scotland this Hero has brought down to Hell with him--Macduff calls it "our *downfallen birthdom,*" and Ross says it "cannot / Be called our mother but our grave, where nothing / But who knows nothing is once seen to smile; / Where sighs and growns, and shrieks that rent the air, / Are made, not marked." But now, the pious Duncan dead, the "most pious Edward," called the confessor, will serve symbolically as Redeemer.* King Edward is strangely endowed with the power of healing disease, called "the Evil," by touch--"Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand." "How he solicits heaven / Himself best knows." "With this strange virtue, / He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy." It is the mystery of God's grace, and he is doing the Lord's business in authorizing Siward, the Earl of Northumberland, to lead an English force into Scotland to join with Malcolm's Scots to destory the evil there. These are the true soldiers of the Lord, although of course shrewd in the practical tactics of the campaign, making use of the deceit of camouflage in the matter of Birnam Wood. And at the end, as the eyes of the "dead butcher" glare sightlessly from the bloody head, Malcolm, about to proceed to Scone for the second coronation of the play, announces the new dispensation, brought about, as Shakespeare makes him say, "by the grace of Grace" (the First Folio authorizes the upper-case *G* in both instances). Happy ending. Surely we rejoice at the triumph of Good.

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* The redemption theme is explored by L. C. Knights in "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" Part of that essay is reprinted in the Pelican Original, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, edited by Laurence Lerner.

This view of the narrative is clearly supported by the text. There are no such suggestions in Holinshed's narrative, his matter-of-fact prose. But Shakespeare, in reworking his material as poet, gave the story symbolic pattern, the pattern itself furnished by the ancient story that imbeds itself deeply in the childhood memory of all people brought up in a Christian culture. If he did it consciously--and how otherwise can the language of the play be explained?--he could do it with full confidence of an instinctive understanding in his audience of what he was up to. It is an example of the anthropologist Franz Boas' view of the relationship in which the artist stands to his audience. In this case, the word communion seems appropriate.

And communion, which means both the celebration of the Lord's Supper and fellowship, or act of sharing, may now give us a clue to the puzzle of Shakespeare's bold revision of the convention of the tragic hero in this play, of the challenge to our pity and our terror made by Shakespeare's "tragic villain." In the Christian view of things, we all carry the seeds of damnation within us, and, if we attend at once to the play and to ourselves as we are drawn into the play, we may detect Macbeth's black desires within ourselves. As Dostoievsky's Underground Man says to us at the conclusion of his confession, "I have in my life only carried to an extreme what you have not dared to carry halfway, and what's more, you have taken your cowardice for good sense, and have found comfort in deceiving yourselves." Yes, tragic pity and terror indeed; but Christian, not Classical, not Pagan. There is no concept of sin in the Greek drama.

V. Plot Conventions

"The first essential," Aristotle wrote, "the life and soul, so to speak, of tragedy is the plot"; and he proceeds to define the ideal tragic plot as a story in which "a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just," but an "intermediate kind of personage," is brought to misfortune "not by vice and depravity"--for that would not be tragedy but only justice--"but by some error of judgment." And he adds to it in one passage the element of tragic knowledge, "discovery," which ideally should accompany the catastrophe ("reversal"). This is the classic statement of tragic plot structure, of "tragic form." Aristotle derived it from his analytical studies of the great Athenian tragedies that had been produced in the preceding century (chronologically, Aristotle stood to Sophocles almost exactly as Dryden the critical theorist and playwright stood to Shakespeare, whom he wrote about). In the pre-Aristotelian Greek plays the pattern may be felt as a plot archetype, an original model upon which variations were to be played continuously through time.

The story of the Fall in the third chapter of Genesis is the most compelling tragic plot archetype in the Judaic-Christian tradition, and it introduces an archetypal character not really to be found in the Greek plays: the character of the Tempter. In this basic plot, the good man (and woman) living in a state of innocence (Eden) is tempted by the Serpent; and the temptation involves the most ancient and persistent of human delusions: "ye shall not surely die." The tragic error is the eating of the fruit, the tragic reversal the Explusion from the Garden. The fruit of the tree proves to be tragic knowledge ("discovery"). The archetype appears and reappears in Christian narrative as the fall from innocence into experience.

The New Testament adds Redemption to the ancient plot archetype, and it too appears and reappears in many forms. Students encountered it in the ninth grade, perhaps without knowing it, in Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," in the triumph-in-defeat of the fisherman Santiago.

> Hemingway sees man crucified by time and the natural world, facing inevitable death, but facing it with dignity and courage. That is his triumph. He can even, like Santiago, like Christ, face it without bitterness and with humility and love for his fellow man and for his fellow creatures. Man's immortality, to Hemingway, is clearly found in his refusal to admit defeat.
>
> --Literature Curriculum III, Teacher Version

Perhaps the Redemption motif is in a kind of parallel with Aristotle's tragic knowledge too, the Hero's "discovery," and what in the tragedies is often felt as the triumph of the indomitable human spirit even in defeat.

And, in Christian tragedy, the "flaw"? A good deal more than that. In the "A" rhyme of the New England Primer, "In Adam's Fall we sinned all." One like ourselves?--everyone is like ourselves. Yet each sinner is still somehow responsible. This is the tragic paradox in the Christian archetype.

VI. The Macbeths as Dramatic Characters

However, Macbeth is not myth but drama, and the story is worked out in the most concrete terms of human personalities and the specific ways in which they interact. What are these people really? We may proceed in a kind of shorthand, notes for further development in the classroom.

Macbeth:

Great courage and great fear mixed in him. He is known in part by what he fears and what he doesn't fear. In the visible world in which swords clash and heroes die he fears nothing. "What man dare, I dare." This is "brave Macbeth," the scourge of traitors we see and hear about in the first scenes. It is the spirits of the invisible world that he fears, the "horrible imaginings" of the mind that "unfixes" his hair and makes his heart pound "against the use of nature."

Paradox: in his strength is his flaw. Left alone, his "horrible imaginings" would have kept him from the deed--"We will proceed no further in this business." But in what follows in the seduction scene

Lady Macbeth derides the fear and shrewdly, knowing her man, plays upon the strength, on his "manhood" (as Cassius, in his seduction of Brutus, plays upon Brutus' source of strength, his "honor"). "Would'st thou have that / Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life, / And live a *coward* in thine own esteem? . . . . When you durst do it, then you were a *man.*" Note ironic play on "man" and "manhood" throughout the play. For instance, Macbeth adopts his wife's stratagem in bending the murderers of Banquo to *his* will. Goaded by him in Act III, Scene I, the first murderer says in his corrupt male pride, "We are *men,* my liege." Much later in the play, Malcolm, trying to help Macduff in his moment of stunned grief, says, "Dispute it like a man." And Macduff: "I shall do so; / But I must also *feel* it like a man." To be a true man is to be truly, wholly, human: to be brave in good causes but also to know love. To be a part of humanity. Macbeth's kind of "manliness" triumphs over his "manhood" and cuts him off forever from humanity. Yet we remember with admiration the valiant soldier at the start, and remember it with tragic force at the end when he tries to return to his old role. "Give me my armor." "'Tis not needed yet." "I'll put it on." And, when Birnam Wood has against all reason begun to move:

> Ring the alarum-bell! Blow wind, come wrack,
> At least we'll die with harness on our back."

But the valiant enemy of traitors of the first act has now himself long been the most fallen of traitors. Note contrast with the description of the death of the traitor Cawdor, who repented before his execution, so that "Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving of it."

The complexity of his self-deception. Somehow he "knows" the deeper truths without *knowing* them. He knows and articulates in the grandest language not only all the profound arguments against the initial crime, but "knows" also in a moment of clear insight what the consequences will be for him, "here upon this bank and shoal of time." He predicts the whole course of his tragic career with shocking accuracy. It is undoubtedly the agony of his inner conflict before the deed that is the source of our deepest sympatny with him. To *know,* and yet to be compelled by his "manhood" to toss the knowledge aside!

Lady Macbeth:

The fascinating mystery of the love between them. "My dearest partner of greatness." Never forget that she is not Tempter but *Temptress:* the Eve of the Wife of Bath's fifth husband,"that for her wikkednesse / Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse." In her play upon Macbeth's "manhood" she sharpens her scorn of his cowardice, his "unmanliness," with sexual scorn: "From this time / Such I account your *love.*" Yet, driven by her dreadful single purpose, she must deny the feminine principle. Note her invocation to the powers of darkness: "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal [deadly] thoughts, unsex me here" (and Shakespeare never allows her to use the language of love with her husband). She becomes androgynous, like the witches, earning the man's awed tribute: "Bring forth men-children only; / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males." But what a brood it would be. The Hell-Hounds that issue howling from the womb of Sin, Portress of Hell-gate, in the second book of Paradise Lost.

Her cast of mind. In the first two acts, conflict between her and her husband seems to be between the imaginative and the realistic tempers. Lady Macbeth sees with the physical sense only. Literal-minded, like Shylock. "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep"--and she: "What do you mean?" "Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house"--and she: "Who was it that thus cried?" Blood for her is but blood: "A little water clears us of this deed." She is terrifyingly sensible: "What's done is done." And sees no ghosts: "You look but on a stool." The most mismatched couple in the history of literature. The constant din of What do you mean? What do you mean? Poor man.

But profoundly self-deceived. In these first Acts she gives herself away once without seeming to know it: "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't." Then the growing-apart of the accomplices. She is physically absent from the stage from Act III, Scene 2, until Act V. Her absence, her aloneness. She has done her work on her husband well. Queen? Alone. Her mind full of scorpions. Tragic knowledge of her plight? At the end, fear of the dark, but "discovery" only when conscious control is relaxed in sleep. Then, dramatic recapitulation coupled by the playwright with profound psychological insight: "Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier and afeard? . . . Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" A little water clears us of this deed? "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." It is the disease of damnation that is indeed beyond medical practice.

And her "eulogy"? "She should have died hereafter." "Fiend-like Queen"? Even Milton felt sympathy for his Satan.

VII. Structure

The archetypal plot may be seen as the principle of structure. Certainly--as usual with Shakespeare--more important than Act Divisions ("External Form").

Compare with Julius Caesar. In character patterns, Macbeth as Brutus, Lady Macbeth as Cassius. Murder of Duncan, murder of Caesar, the structural fulcrums. Agony of decision-making before, revenge plot afterward.

Note the battle frame: begins in the field of war, ends in the field of war. Re-established harmony at the end less clear in Julius Caesar than in Macbeth. Roman history would not allow it.

VIII. Tragic Motifs and Conventions

Tragic Knowledge. Treated above, passim.

Tragic Isolation. Northrop Frye: "the center of tragedy is in the hero's isolation." Much more than a device, especially in Shakespeare. The penalty of the tragic error is always the breaking of the human bond: an ultimate *alienation* (Hamlet an exception?). "Why do you keep alone?" Another of Lady Macbeth's stupid questions. He condemned himself to aloneness when he made the fatal decision. *As he foresaw.*

Tragic Irony. As with tragic isolation, more than a dramatic convention. Issues profoundly from the ambiguity, the riddle or double meaning at the heart of things, which are seldom what they seem. "There's no art," poor Duncan says, saddened by the treason of Cawdor, "to find the mind's construction in the face." Preparation for the irony of his speech about Macbeth only minutes later. "It is a peerless kinsman." Remark again: *irony dramatically conceived is the perception of the double meaning made possible by the audience's superior knowledge.*

Note, then:

Macbeth to Duncan, I, 4:
> I'll be myself the harbinger, and *make joyful*
> The hearing of my wife with your approach. . .

Banquo before the castle, I, 6:
> Heaven's breath smells wooingly here. . .

Macbeth to Banquo, III, 1:
> "Fail not our feast."

Banquo:
> "My lord, I will not."

Lennox, taking courteous leave of Lady Macbeth at the end of the "feast", III, 3:
> "Good night and a better health /Attend his majesty."

Sometimes the irony seems intended by the speaker in the simplest of double meanings, as, when hearing in II, 3, Lennox's description of the mad tumult of nature on the murder night, Macbeth comments drily: "'Twas a rough night."

So it goes. And the playwright makes all things relate. The double meaning of dramatic irony relates to the double meaning of the fiddles of the witches, the fiends that lie like truth (V, 5), the "juggling fiends... That palter with us in a double sense." It relates to the device of the mask, the disguise--"False face must hide what the false heart doth know." It relates to the costume imagery which, issuing naturally out of the stage costuming, repeatedly reinforces the point. "The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?" Living in the borrowed robes first of Cawdor and then of Duncan, Macbeth begins to lose his sense of identity:

> Still it cried, 'Sleep no more!' to all the house;
> 'Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor
> Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more"--

which leads to the related truth he sees at the end of that scene (II, 2): "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself." And so, at the very end, the Macbeth who in the first act was figured in the battle report of the Captain as eagle or lion, becomes in the ironic reversal the bear of public sport, tied to the stake, unable to fly, baited by --dogs?

IX. Poetry

Poetry in the most comprehensive sense. It speaks in many ways through rhythm, image, symbol. On the stage even the prop, dagger or diamond, may be endowed with poetic or symbolic resonance. Real dagger, the actual tool of regicide, lodged in the consciousness as well as in the bodies of Duncan and Banquo, becomes the dagger of the mind. Bells toll offstage, the knocking at the gate enters into it. "Hang out our banners on the outward walls," Macbeth commands, preparing for siege. Costuming of the castle. Another deceit.

Imagery, both verbal and visible on the stage, creates the subjective atmosphere through which the plot moves. Light and dark, day and night, fair and foul--these recurrent opposites reflect the moral confusion in the minds of the protagonists, making the abstract real, concrete, visible. Blood is the dominant image, the play is gashed with mortal wounds. "But I am faint," the valiant Captain says in the second scene, "my gashes cry for help." At the end, Macbeth, electing not to "play the Roman fool," cries in the murderous fury of his despair: "Whiles I see lives, the gashes / Do better on them." Blood will have blood. Of all the genre conventions which Shakespeare coerced and bent to his own high tragic purposes, those of the sensational and melodramatic "tragedy of blood" that he inherited from Kyd and others underwent the most breathtaking metamorphoses.

Birds, beasts, insects are turned to his atmospheric purposes. Raven gives way to martlet which gives way to the owl that hawks the falcon on the night of the first murder, when all nature suffers a convulsion suggesting an interpenetration of the natural and spiritual universes; a convention again, but here suggesting the eclipse that darkened the sun at the time of the Crucifixion.

The famous witches are of course a part of it. They are not really Fates, they do not determine anything. They of course issue out of folk superstition, although at the time of the composition of Macbeth the folk belief had been given royal status by the credulous interest of the Scottish James I. For Shakespeare, however, they appear first to serve the purpose of atmospheric prologue, then in the first prophecies as projections of Macbeth's black desires, finally as the riddlers who complete his ruin and symbolize his comple surrender to the powers of darkness.

The great poetry that Shakespeare writes for Macbeth himself endows him with tragic beauty, a poetry dramatically inseparable from the conception of his character as a man with an hallucinated mind. The Hero and his poetry are one; he is his poetry.

It is a nervous style that varies, as dramatic verse should, with the situation and stresses of the moment. It must suffice here to comment briefly on one of the most famous of the great speeches, the one touched off by the knocking of Macduff and Lennox at the porter's gate after the murder:

> Whence is that knocking?
> How is't with me when every noise appals me?
> What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

Four of these six sentences are questions, that perfectly reflect his state of mental shock. "Whence?"--the sense of place that when recovered upon awakening from a nightmare is of such comfort is lost, the familiar castle now unfamiliar. "What hands"--they have been bloodstained before, blood for him has been the honorable badge of his soldier's profession--but not blood like this, so, *what* hands, *whose?* Surely not his. They then seem endowed with volition of their own, automactically trying to obey the impulse to destroy the eyes, to blind the physical vision as the moral vision has been blinded (an ancient symbol--blind Tiresias, blinded Oedipus). Then, how to cleanse them, *could* the whole ocean do it? The strong caesura of the fifth line marks the pause for the moment of realization. Then the deadly answer. *No* cleansing; rather, the blood of this sacrilegious murder will stain great Neptune's ocean itself, the taint of that dye extending around the globe. Movement and diction support and enhance the vision. The sense units are short at the start--a half-line, a line, a half-line, another half-line--the thought groping its way toward the discovery; and the diction is brutally plain--only three words, and they are simple ones, in the first four and a half lines have more than one syllable, and the monosyllables fall upon the senses like lead: *noise*, *me*, *hands*, *pluck*, *eyes*, *clean*, and *hands*, *hand*, *hand*. Then the glorious polysyllabic rush at the climax of the vision--"the multitudinous seas incarnadine"--its great metrical beauty shockingly at odds with the evil of the vision; but immediately brought down: "making the green one red" (*all* red). This is Macbeth's poetry of total awareness, the real tragic "discovery." And the beauty of the verse acts as a kind of poetic redemption, while at the same time the power of it binds us to his cursed soul in a kind of ultimate empathy.

And the most anthologized speech of the play? Life "is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing"? The high artistic design of the drama implicitly refutes it. The moral vision that governs the design gives the lie to "signifying nothing."

X. Ghosts

The movement from Shakespeare to Ibsen will be from open stage to boxset and fourth-wall convention; from poetry to prose; from great personages royally costumed to ordinary people in drab middle-class garments; from castles to orphanages; from feudal oaths of fealty to financial deals and insurance policies; and yet--from symbolic castles to symbolic orphanages; from ghosts and daggers of the mind to--ghosts and daggers of the mind; and from blood curse to blood curse.

Behind both the differences and the similarities, helping to determine them, are the changing social, intellectual, and religious circumstances, working their own coercions on the imperatives of the tragic genre.

LITERATURE CURRICULUM V

Ghosts

Teacher Version

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Teacher Version

Text: Ibsen, Henrik. Ghosts and Other Plays, translated by Peter Watts and edited by E. V. Rieu (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1964). $1.25.

Ghosts

I. Tragedy and the Common Man

In discussing the nature of tragedy Aristotle points out that there are three kinds of plot the playwright must avoid. First, the story must not be that of a good man passing from happiness to misery, because such a situation inspires in the audience neither pity nor fear; it is simply odious. Second, the story must not depict a bad man passing from misery to happiness because, obviously, such a story would be most un-tragic. Third, the story should not show a bad man falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse our feelings, but it will not move us to the pity we feel at seeing undeserved misfortune, nor will it move us to the fear we experience at the sight of such a misfortune occurring to someone like ourselves. There remains what Aristotle calls the intermediate kind of person, the average man, a man who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, but who shares in the virtues and vices of the average member of the audience. He goes on to point out that the tragic hero's misfortune "is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous,-- a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families."

This last statement is, of course, a qualification of what Aristotle had said just before; when he refers to the average man and then to Oedipus as "highly renowned and prosperous," we must assume that his idea of the average man is not the man in the street, but rather a man compounded of both good and bad, both found together in a man of unusual strength, character, etc.

This dramatic convention--that tragedy deals with "men of note," with characters of high rank, with the illustrious and powerful, a convention first adhered to by the Greek playwrights--was followed by nearly all subsequent tragedians until just before our own time. Note, for example, that Oedipus deals mainly with a Greek king, his wife, and her brother; the principal characters of Macbeth are a king, his wife, and other nobles; Julius Caesar deals with the same upper levels of society; Othello, King Lear, Hamlet--all are concerned primarily with men of high rank. There are exceptions, of course, but generally Greek and English tragedy are not primarily concerned with the average man, and still less with the lower classes.

It was not till the latter part of the nineteenth century that the dramatist turned towards the common man as his potential tragic hero. This was a development concomitant with, in general, the gradual democratization of society and the elimination of class structures. The relevant problem here for the dramatist can be stated in this manner: is the common man as appropriate a subject for the highest form of tragedy as kings were? Can the audience experience catharsis, the purgation of the emotions, as much from observing the tragic life of a salesman as it can from that of a king?

For one answer to this question let us turn briefly to the contemporary American dramatist Arthur Miller, whose most famous play, Death of a Salesman (1949), concerns the tragic life of Willy Loman (lo-man), a travelling salesman. In his essay "Tragedy and the Common Man" (1949) Miller attempts to show that the average man in the street is just as apt a subject for the highest tragedy as kings ever were. He points out that we never fail to attribute to highly-placed persons the same sort of mental processes as anyone else has. Then he posits, as a general rule, that "the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity." He points out that, as a consequence of this rule, in tragedies from the Greek to the Elizabethan, the tragic hero thus seeks to come to a just evaluation of himself. The average man can also suffer, can also feel the crushing sense of his loss of dignity; hence, since ours is no longer an age of kings, we must follow the idea of the perfectibility of man, which lies in tragedy alone, "to the only place it can possibly lead in our time--the heart and spirit of the average man."

These considerations lead us to Henrik Ibsen, whom we may with some justice call the first tragedian of the common man. Ghosts is pre-eminently a picture of the tragedy which can befall average people who go about the business of their daily lives in pretty much a routine manner. The setting, although perhaps a bit unusual to our American eyes, is typically Norwegian; the Alving family, unhappy though it is and beset with serious problems, is still a fairly typical, upper-middle-class family; the other characters are, in varying degrees, ordinary people. The principal element of the story --the son and mother suffering for the sins of the father--is a universal problem, unrestricted to any one class or group. Yet, from such apparently hum-drum, ordinary materials, Ibsen has fashioned one of the most powerful, moving tragedies of the modern theatre.

II. Ghosts: Theme

At the beginning of the second act, after Mrs. Alving, Osvald, and Pastor Manders have had dinner together, the cleric and Mrs. Alving continue the revealing discussion which had begun before dinner. Shortly after they resume their talk occur two of the key passages of the entire play; considering these two passages, and their relation to the rest of the play, we see developed the two most important ideas Ibsen was advancing.

Ibsen was principally a writer of dramas of the mind, of plays which are concerned much more with ideas than with dramatic action. His object was to reveal the innermost workings of the soul, the secret lives of men. He was concerned not so much with action as with the subsequent effect of action. In this respect Ibsen was closely related to the Greek dramatists. We might remember,for example, that in Oedipus there is little that we can call action; the principal characters discuss, argue, and debate, while messengers come and go, bringing us news about events--events which always occur offstage. Sophocles was interested in the significance of the action, what the action meant--but not the action itself. So Ibsen. The fire at the orphanage is seen by the characters on-stage, but they must go off-stage to get to it; their departure from the stage signals the end of Act II.

Ibsen also employed another device, that of having most of the important actions occur before the play begins. It is in this sense of antecedent action that the significance of the title becomes most apparent. Mrs. Alving tells the Pastor that "I'm inclined to think that we're all ghosts. . .it's not only the things that we've inherited from our fathers and mothers that live on in us, but all sorts of old dead ideas and old dead beliefs, and things of that sort. They're not actually alive in us, but they're rooted there all the same, and we can't rid ourselves of them" (p. 61). This is the key idea of the play. The principal inheritance, the major "ghost" of the play, is the venereal disease Osvald has inherited from his father. By the time Osvald comes back to his mother's home the disease has already started to affect him seriously: "Mother, my mind's gone--broken down--I shall never be able to work again" (p. 73). In discussing his malady a doctor had told him bluntly that "'The sins of the fathers are visited on the children'" (p. 74). Osvald, in extreme indignation, had refused to believe him, and thought rather that it was the "gloriously happy life" he had had with his friends which had simply been too much for his strength. Later, in Act III, as the orphanage fire is being discussed, Osvald mentions "Here am I burning up, too" (p. 90)--the effects of the disease are obviously rapidly increasing. The climax of this theme occurs in the last few moments of the play; Osvald's mind has become completely the victim of his inherited "ghost" as he asks his mother to "give me the sun" (p. 101). She stands in agony, undecided as to whether she should give her son the means to end his life--a life ruined by inheritance.

There are other inheritances as well. Mrs. Alving has "inherited" from her husband nineteen years of misery, of unhappy marriage, of having to keep the truth from her son, from her pastor, from the world; she suffers also because of Osvald's suffering, and at the end of the play she is left with her demented son and the morphine tablets. Regina's inheritance is much different, but no less cruel; she has had to suffer with putting up with the crude, vulgar person she thought was her father, and she has spent her life as a servant instead of being educated as a lady--her rightful inheritance. Even Engstrand has, in a sense, suffered from his inheritance: had he known who his wife's lover really was, he undoubtedly would have found the means to profit from it much more than he now has.

The second key idea in the play has already been partly indicated; in the passage on page 61 previously quoted, Mrs. Alving refers to "all sorts of old dead ideas and old dead beliefs." She does not accept many of the traditional beliefs of her society; she is, in a sense, an enligtened rebel, particularly in contrast to the puritanical, ultra-conservative Pastor Manders.

Mrs. Alving's iconoclasm is first seen with regard to a quite minor point: she invites the Pastor to spend the night at her house, as she had invited him many times before, but he once again refuses. She adds, "All the same, I do think a couple of old people like us. . ." (p. 31), implying that there would be nothing shocking about the two of them staying in the same house together (and of course Osvald and Regina are there also), but he replies moralistically "Good gracious, what a thing to say!" Then, a moment later, he criticizes the books she has been reading (although he has never read them himself). She replies that "there's really nothing particularly new in these books--nothing more than what most people think and believe already" (p. 32).

A more serious point is seen later in their discussion, when the Pastor has suggested that Mrs. Alving should not stand in the way if it ever becomes necessary for Regina to go home and live with her father again. Mrs. Alving's reaction to this is a very forceful "I've taken Regina into my house, and there she shall stay" (p. 39). She is not in the least moved by his pointing out that the girl would be with her father--the conventional relationship. Her comment on that is "I know exactly what sort of a father he's been to her," with an ironic emphasis on "exactly." And later, after Osvald has discussed his friendship with some unmarried couples living together with their children, Mrs. Alving says she agrees completely with every approving word Osvald has for his friends.

In the last few minutes of Act I we have one of the crucial scenes of the play--the revelation by Mrs. Alving to Pastor Manders of the true situation of her married life many years before. In reply to his accusation that she failed in her duty as a wife by running away from her husband and coming to him [Manders], she says "Yes, Pastor Manders, that was certainly your doing" (p. 47). The crucial point here is that her answer is extremely ironic: Manders certainly had brought her back to her husband--unfortunately, since it was precisely what she did not want; on the other hand she definitely had wanted Manders to take her, as he himself clearly points out later (p. 62).

Mrs. Alving's iconoclastic attitude towards many of the conventional ideas of society is seen especially in her comments on the present situation of her son and herself. She feels most strongly that she has for years done the wrong thing by not revealing the truth to him: "If I were the woman I ought to be, I should take Osvald on one side and say: 'Listen, my boy, your father was a dissolute man--'" (p. 59), but "I'm such a coward." And further, "thanks to my regard for duty, I've been lying to my boy for years on end. What a coward--what a coward I've been!" (p. 59). This accusation is repeated many times and becomes almost a sort of refrain. Near the end of Act II, after Osvald has revealed to her the nature of his sickness (and the doctor's comment about "the sins of the fathers. . ." reveals to her much more of the complete truth than it has to Osvald), and after he has expressed to her his love for Regina, she finally resolves to tell the whole truth, in the presence of all. But just as she is about to do so the orphanage fire puts a stop to everything.

After the memorial in tribute to her dead husband has been destroyed by fire; after Manders has left, the symbol of puritanical conscience, the symbol of a long-dead but not forgotten love; after Engstrand has left, whose ingratiating presence rubs on everyone's nerves but Manders'; with only her son and her husband's daughter with her--finally Mrs. Alving tells the whole truth. Regina, justifiably angered, leaves the house immediately. Not long after, when day arrives and the sun shines for the first time in the play, Osvald's mind finally breaks, and Mrs. Alving is left with her agonizing decision.

Ghosts tells the story of a woman who, now a widow, at one time made a weak effort to assert her freedom but gave in to the pressures of the social order and suffered the tragic consequences. As Ibsen put it in one of his notes to the play: "These modern women mishandled as daughters, as sisters, as wives, not raised according to their gifts, kept from their call, deprived of their inheritance, embittered in their hearts, --these are the ones who produce the mothers for the young generation. What shall be the consequences?" It is precisely in these "consequences" where the tragedy really lies--Mrs. Alving's struggle against her heritage from the past--the physical heritage of the son, the spiritual heritage of the wife and mother. As the English critic Robert Tennant has put it, "the realistic motif of venereal disease is only a cloak for the old testament doctrine of the visitation of the sins of the fathers, and the real centre of the tragedy is Mrs. Alving, who is punished for having married a man with money whom she did not love."

To study the theme of Ghosts from other points of view, let us briefly examine the characters individually.

Of all the people in the play, only Engstrand is conniving, double-dealing, underhanded, deceitful. He is the schemer, the one who causes things to happen. There is something comically absurd about the manner in which he makes a fool of Manders, getting this righteous simpleton to agree to become a patron of his seamen's home. Only Regina sees through him clearly, and she despises him. In the end, though, "tragically" enough, he is the only one who gets all that he wants. He is ethically guilty.

Pastor Manders is a simple-minded dreamer, self-centered and insensitive, who deceives himself as much as he is deceived by others. His first consideration in a difficult situation is always for his own survival. Mentally lazy and lacking in courage, he is willing to let his superiors do his thinking for him. He is cowardly, but unaware of it. His lack of awareness of himself and of the world in which he lives is sign of a restricted childhood and of a narrow education. He is almost like a Greek chorus in his voicing of the concerns of society and of the need for maintaining law and order. We obviously cannot consider him guilty of any crime; but Mrs. Alving would certainly consider him seriously guilty of insensitivity, of lack of charity, of moral cowardice.

Osvald, the issue of a loveless and partially debauched marriage, was doomed from birth. Sent away from home when he was seven years old, he never knew what it was to have a father and mother. While pursuing his artistic life, he became acquainted with the happy home life of couples who could not marry because they could not afford marriage. Tainted from birth, raised in an abnormal environment, he had little chance to become aware of parental love. He knew that his artist friends were happy, that they shared in the joy of life; he also wished somehow to share this joy, but he found none of it in his home or with his mother. Osvald is the sin of his father made flesh, he is the embodiment of hereditary guilt. But he is as blameless as Oedipus, even more so. He has done nothing wrong except to be born.

Intelligent, alert, inquisitive, Mrs. Alving was properly raised in a household that, we can infer, was ruled according to the best dictates of society. Though she loved Pastor Manders, she knew her duty to her family and married Alving. Frustrated in a nightmare of a marriage, she began to question the values of a society that seemed to have brought her to this condition. In her hopeless situation, she found only one bit of happiness--her son. However, according to the dictates of her own conscience, she was ethically guilty in returning to Alving after she had gone to Manders for refuge. She knew that she was wrong in doing so. Mother and son share the tragic guilt; she is ethically guilty; he is guilty only of his heredity.

III. Ghosts: Point of View

When Ibsen learned of Darwin's theory of the evolutionary movement of all living organisms, he adapted this idea as part of his theory of art. In one of his notes preliminary to the writing of Ghosts we find this statement of artistic belief: "The complete person is no longer a natural product, it is an art product such as the grain is, and the fruit trees, and the Creole race, and the noble horse, and the racing dog, the vine, etc.--" All of these products are refinements by man on a natural object. Natural man is no longer completely natural; he has changed both himself and the world in which he lives. As Ibsen stated it in another note, while man was creating these artistic objects, the whole of humanity had gotten on the wrong way, and it was society, with its institutions, which was the villain. It is no wonder that Ibsen was often accused of being a nihilist; he thought that much of modern man's life was not only useless but evil; hence, as is quite obvious in Ghosts, he repeatedly attacked man's social institutions. In this sense Ibsen was a thesis writer engaged in a form of polemics, but, as he insisted emphatically, he was essentially an artist. His secondary concern was to expound his ideas on man and society; his primary concern was to create a work of art.

Misunderstandings arose in his time, as they still do in our day, with regard to his choice of appropriate subject matter for his artistic creations. In defense of his choice of material, he often remarked that he must help to move the boundary stakes, i. e. he had to enlarge society's view of itself and of man, enlarge it and deepen it. He was insisting here on the freedom of the artist to choose such subject matter as was necessary to the creation of a particular work of art. This attitude of Ibsen's was neither whimsical nor arbitrary; it was grounded, rather, in the deep-seated belief that no division can exist between life and art, for, to him, all life is an art.

This belief was so firmly rooted in his being that he was often accused of writing himself into each of his plays. In exasperation at these accusations he wrote to a friend, just after Ghosts was published, that the Norwegian reviewers had an indisputable talent for misunderstanding the authors they reviewed. He went on to say that there is not in the whole of Ghosts a single opinion, not one statement, which stands for the author's conclusion. He had watched carefully for this. Thus when William Archer, the English playwright, once asked Ibsen how Ghosts finished (i. e. what did Mrs. Alving do with the morphine tablets?), Ibsen replied: "I don't know. Each one must find that out for himself. I should never dream of deciding so delicate a question. But what is your opinion?" Further, Ibsen said that the method, the technical art, which is the basis for the play's form, forbade almost of itself the author's appearing in the speeches. His intention, he said, was to evoke from the reader the impression that, during the reading, he experienced a piece of reality. But, said Ibsen, nothing would work more against this intention than to insert the author's opinions in the dialogue. Did they not believe at home, he asked, that he possessed enough critical acumen so that he could perceive this? Yes, he had perceived it, and he had handled it. He pointed out further that in none of his plays is he so outside, so absolutely away, as in Ghosts. The reviewers said that the book proclaims nihilism. Not at all. It does not proclaim anything of the kind. Furthermore, Ibsen continued, it points out that nihilism ferments under the surface, at home as in other places. And thus he has depicted it.

Though Ibsen emphatically states that he very carefully kept his opinions out of Ghosts, his point of view with regard to the force of heredity and environment concentrated the story of the play upon Mrs. Alving. Through her dilemma, we recognize that this force is neither good nor evil. Like the Greek fate, it is disembodied and powerful. Just as Oedipus, through heredity, but from no fault of his own, is the son of the man he kills and of the woman he marries, so Mrs. Alving gives birth to a son doomed by heredity. They are both victims of fate, which, of its very nature, is impersonal.

IV. Ghosts: Form

Ibsen used a form of exposition in Ghosts which he had developed over a number of years. He had derived it after using, at various times, each of the following forms:

> 1. The action begins at the beginning and proceeds chronologically. Of the methods available, this one probably gives the playwright the most freedom in unfolding a story and in developing characters. We often note this method in Shakespeare; in Julius Caesar, for example, there is little recapitulation of events that occurred before the play itself begins.
>
> 2. The action begins later and consists largely of a recapitulation of preceding events and, especially, of their effect on the present. There is no exposition as such; it is, rather, analytic.
>
> 3. The action begins near the crisis, and after the recapitulation in the first act of what has occurred before, the action works up to the crisis proper. This is true exposition, either conventional or highly dramatized.
>
> 4. Exposition much like the previous kind (#3); yet, later on in the play, in the course and stress of the action, material from the past is still being introduced.

The first of these forms can look only to the future; the other three give the author the opportunity to look both forward and back. Greek tragedy, based on the influence of fate on man, reached into the past for motivation and action; Ibsen, though he substituted the force of heredity and environment for fate, also made much use of exposition of the past.

The three-act structure of Ghosts presents a tripartite story: a problem is posed, attempts are made to solve the problem, a catastrophe results. Let us look at this general structure in more detail.

The first part of Act I introduces the Regina-Engstrand relation. The dominant note of this relation is distrust on Regina's part, and mutual dislike. We should also note Regina's comment, muttered under her breath, "You've always said I was none of yours" (p. 23), countered later by Engstrand's insistent "I am your father, you know; I can prove it by the Parish Register" (p. 27). The second part of this act is concerned mainly with the long discussion between Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders, the principal results of which are the revealing of Mrs. Alving's rebellious attitude towards some of the conventional ideas of society, and the revealing also of the dissolute life, both before and after marriage, of her late, supposedly virtuous husband.

Two other points are important. First, Mrs. Alving's shocked reaction and hasty denials when the Pastor remarks that Osvald, smoking a pipe, looks very much like his father. The reasons for denying that her son looks like his father become obvious later. Second, Mrs. Alving's shock at hearing the slight commotion between Osvald and Regina in the dining-room: "Ghosts! The couple in the conservatory--walking again" (p. 54).

Hence the first act ends with the presentation of the major problem confronting Mrs. Alving: will she succeed in getting rid of the ghost of Alving?

The first part of Act II continues the discussion between Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders. The principal point here is the insistence upon the presence of "ghosts," and Mrs. Alving's theme-like lament about her cowardice in failing to reveal the truth to her son. After a brief interlude with Engstrand, the second part of this act concerns Osvald's revelation to his mother of his sickness. He refuses to accept a medical opinion as to the cause of his illness, but his mother quickly perceives the truth of the doctor's diagnosis. As a further trial to the mother, her son evinces a strong affection for Regina, who is actually his half-sister. This convinces Mrs. Alving, finally, that she absolutely must reveal the truth, now, and not a moment later; she is about to do so when the fire breaks out at the orphanage. This act, then, is centered on Mrs. Alving's attempts to rid herself of the evil ghost of her husband, which she hopes to do through building the orphanage; but, on the evening before its dedication, she receives a double set-back: the building burns to the ground, and, at the same time, this fire thwarts her attempt to reveal the truth to her son about his father.

The first part of Act III disposes of Engstrand and the Pastor. Engstrand hypocritically insists that Pastor Manders is responsible for the fire, but then says that he will take the blame for it; consequently, the Pastor says that he certainly will help Engstrand with his home for seafaring men. Once this neat little bit of blackmail is concluded, the two leave the stage to the mother and son for the climatic scene. The evil which has existed since the beginning of the play cannot be buried; hence Osvald reveals to his mother that the disease he has inherited is a mental one. The play ends with his asking for the sun and with her holding the tablets in an excruciating agony of indecision.

This three-part division of Ibsen's social drama is, in many ways, similar to that of a formal essay: Introduction, Body, and Conclusion.

1. Introduction: the background information is developed up to the thesis sentence: heredity and environment rule the life of man.

2. Body: a) Mrs. Alving is having an orphanage built to the memory of her husband; but it burns to the ground, uninsured, and will not be rebuilt.

b) Osvald has returned home to remain with his mother. After the burning of the orphanage and Osvald's revelation of his illness, the mother loses her son to the malady.

c) Mrs. Alving is raising Regina to be a respectable young lady. When Regina learns of her background, she goes to become a part of that life which is natural to her.

3. Conclusion: the will of man is not enough to defeat the force of heredity and environment.

V. Conclusion

What, in the final analysis, is the tragedy of Ghosts? Mrs. Alving married a rich man on the advice of her mother and two aunts; he was a man she did not especially care for, but he was rich; hence she let her better judgment be swayed by his fortune. Her husband was debauched, both before and after the marriage. The results were a life of misery and a son who inherited a killing disease from his father. The problem was further complicated by the mother's inability to gather up enough courage, throughout her son's life, to tell him the truth about his father. She finally does summon up enough strength to tell him, but he loses his mind immediately after as a result of the inherited disease, leaving her with the decision of whether to give him the pills which will end his now insane life.

Initially, Mrs. Alving made a fatal decision: she never should have let money influence her choice of a marriage partner, even though the influence came by way of her mother and aunts. We see here exemplified very clearly what Aristotle called the "error or frailty" of the tragic hero. From this one error flows everything else. Her insistence on her cowardice in not telling the truth to her son is another error, but not as serious a one; even had she told him, he still would have died as a result of the inherited disease. Telling him would have been an assertion of courage on her part, but it would not have changed either the time or manner of his death. After her initial decision she becomes a victim of fate, just as Oedipus was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. Of course Ibsen's fate is not that of the Greeks; it takes the form of heredity and environment--particularly social pressures. But, call it what we will, once a person has been pointed to by the Gods who control human destiny, his tragic end is as inevitable as life itself.

LITERATURE CURRICULUM V

The Rivals

by Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Teacher Version

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Teacher Version

The Rivals

I. The Nature of Comedy

In the essay on *Oedipus* we have seen that it is possible to define the nature of tragedy, and Aristotle's definition of tragedy and his brief comments on catharsis show that it is possible to deal with the nature of tragedy in a fairly precise manner. Add to this Aristotle's comments on plot and *hamartia* and the result, for the student, is a small but rather precisely formulated group of statements concerning the nature of Greek tragic drama. We can also see, in the first part of the essay on *Macbeth*, the relations between Aristotle's theory of Greek drama and *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Ghosts*. Such relations are at times perhaps a bit tenuous, but in any case what the students are left with after studying these four tragedies is a fairly specific idea about the nature of tragedy and of the tragic hero: and, of course, this knowledge of tragedy can be used--at least as a starting point--in the study of almost any kind of tragedy.

With comic drama, however, the situation is somewhat different. Aristotle discussed the theory of comedy, and in our own time there have been several important works on this subject, such as George Meredith's *On Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* (1877), Henri Bergson's *Laughter* (1900), Sigmund Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), J. Y. T. Greig's *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy* (1923), Northrop Frye's "The Argument of Comedy," (*English Institute Essays*, 1948), Louis Kronenberger's *The Thread of Laughter* (1952), and Susanne K. Langer's *Feeling and Form* (1953). And there are many more. However, the difficulty here is, as Bonamy Dobrée points out (*Restoration Comedy*, 1924), that no one has yet developed an adequate theory of comedy which covers sufficiently all the different kinds of comic drama. Aristotle's definition of tragedy ("tragedy. . . is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude. . . .") is instantly recognizable to anyone who has studied tragedy with any degree of seriousness. But there is no equivalent definition of comedy, equivalent in either its astuteness or in its being recognized through the ages as perhaps the best point from which to start a discussion of the nature of comic drama.

In spite of these difficulties in arriving at (or finding) a generally accepted definition of comedy, we do have an advantage in discussing comedy which we do not have in discussing tragedy. What does the average citizen feel about the word "tragedy"? See, for instance, how newspapers use the word: when someone is hit on the head and killed by a portable radio accidentally elbowed out of a seventh-floor hotel window, that is called a "tragedy," or a "tragic occurrence," or a "tragic accident." The same is said about the death by drowning of twelve miners whose tools accidentally unleash an underground river which in a moment floods their tunnel. These are, to be sure, "tragic" occurrences, deserving of pity from anyone. But the concept of tragedy used here is different from that which we use in discussing drama as tragic. The difference, of course, is one of causality: Julius Caesar brings about, *causes* his own downfall by his pride and arrogance; Macbeth *causes* his own downfall because of his greed and cruelty; Oedipus *causes* his tragic end by unwittingly bringing about the fulfillment of the prophecy (although it must be admitted that here the principle of causality is not quite as strong as in the other two plays). What occurs to the protagonists of these plays is not brought about by accident, by chance, by luck--it is caused, and caused by themselves. Hence the word "tragic" as used by the student of drama has a more specialized, restricted meaning than it has as used by the general public; one must be educated to the special use of this word; the student of drama feels that the word as commonly used is too wide in application, and hence too vague.

On the other hand this difficulty of definition is not something with which we have to concern ourselves when dealing with comedy. To anyone, comedy is, simply, that which makes us laugh; and we can interpret "laugh" as being anything from a slight crinkling of the eyes and tremor of the lips to the quaking, tears-in-the-eyes belly laugh. And, just as we can distinguish between the two extremes which cause this laughter: on the one hand, the broadest, most obvious kind of farce (the two most famous examples of this are probably the fat, dignified man who slips on a banana peel and lands squarely on his backside; and the pie-in-the-face routine); on the other hand we have the highly intelligent word plays of some of Shakespeare's fools, or the brilliant repartee to be found in Restoration comedies, such as Congreve's *The Way of the World.* Whatever the cause, whatever the effect, no one is likely to be mistaken as to whether the comical is present.

The previous sentence is both correct and misleading, misleading in the sense that what we are dealing with is not just the comical, but rather comedy--dramatic comedy, a form of art, a structured, proportioned entity. The discussion of *Oedipus* points out that any kind of play, even the silliest, flimsiest kind of musical comedy, is based on a story, a plot--there is some kind of conflict, and after the opposing forces have met there is a resolution, a "settling down." What we are getting at here is that even in a comedy someone is the loser--George gets Sally, and John must look around for someone else. Of course John does get someone else, so he is not completely a loser, he also is happy. More important, however, is that the comic dramatist achieves a comic effect in that some characters in the play, as well as the audience, are amused at the expense of others. To put this in different terms, there are those who laugh and there are those who are laughed at--someone is the butt of the joke, and while he stands there, embarrassed, sheepish, others are laughing at him.

This last consideration changes somewhat our conception of comedy, for if someone is being laughed at, then a slight note of cruelty enters into account. Whatever the reason for our laughter, it is, in general, that someone has failed to measure up to our standard, someone has fallen short of the mark we have set; hence, we laugh at him, and consequently we are guilty, at least to some extent, of malice, of cruelty. Here it is, also, that we may see the essential difference between comedy and tragedy. As Louis Kronenberger has put it, tragedy gives its characters an aura of idealism, of doom; it laments "the destructive flaw in man." Comedy, though, cannot function unless this aura of idealism has been done away with; it does not lament the flaw in man but rather looks for it, not maliciously, but "rather because even at his greatest, man offers some touch of the fatuous and small."

We are led, consequently, to another point of capital importance with regard to the nature of comic drama: comedy is criticism. A comedy is not simply an extended joke in a vacuum; it is a work of art in which the artist has decreed that there will be a certain situation, and in that situation there will be some characters who will act foolishly and stupidly, and there will be other characters who laugh at them; in some comedies the audience will laugh at all of them. Comedy is criticism because human nature is exposed. People think they are on a certain level--whether it be social, intellectual, or moral--whereas in truth they are on a much lower level; their true natures being exposed is a criticism of human pretension and vanity. This exposure could be done brutally and cynically, as Alexandre Pope does in his Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, or Jonathan Swift in the last book of Gulliver's Travels. But the comic dramatist, of course, wishes to produce laughter, and so his exposure emphasizes the comic aspects of what human beings think and do.

One last aspect of the theory of comedy remains to be dealt with; it is, as Louis Kronenberger puts it, that "most comedy is born of ignorance or false knowledge; is based on misunderstanding." Note, for example, how large a part ignorance plays in a comedy like The Merchant of Venice: Shylock is ignorant of the true nature of everyone in the play, including his own; Antonio is ignorant of the evil in Shylock; everyone is ignorant of the true identity of Balthazar and his clerk--and so on. In The Rivals we find ignorance of father about son, of son about father, of aunt about niece and vice versa, of master about servant--and so on. We might even go so far as to say that, without the complications which result from misunderstanding and ignorance, much of our comic drama simply would not exist.

In summary, then, the comic dramatist presents for our enjoyment a group of people who, in varying degrees, act foolishly. Although the dramatist's chief function seems to be to make his audience laugh, there is, obviously, in much comic drama an attempt to instruct as well as to amuse. This moral aspect of comedy, and of literature in general, was constantly present in most writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

II. Comic Drama in the Eighteenth Century

In 1642 the Puritan influence had become so strong in England that Parliament forced the theaters to close. From 1642 to 1660 there was virtually no public drama in England, although "entertainments"--often excerpts drawn from plays--were performed, and some plays were staged privately in the houses of noblemen. With the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, English drama experienced a great revival. During the years of exile in France, the members of Charles's court had come under the influence of the French dramatists, the brilliant Corneille and the witty Racine; and hence Restoration plays were, at least to some degree, marked by a French influence. There were, to put it briefly, two kinds of drama which assumed considerable importance in England after the Restoration. The first of these was heroic tragedy--plays written in heroic verse (rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter), dealing with conflicts of love and honor, focusing on characters of social importance (kings, queens, noblemen, etc.), and written in an appropriately grandiose style. The second was what we now call Restoration comedy, a period of English comic drama stretching from 1660 to about 1710, the immediate ancestor of the comedy of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Restoration comedy was laid in the social world of upper-class Londoners. These comedies were to a large extent comedies of manners, building often on plots that were very slight but complex, with double and triple threads of action being common, and with several romantic attachments developing simultaneously. Romantic feeling was often disregarded in favor of wit, and there was more emphasis on the capacity of the drama to delight than to teach. Restoration comedy was realistic in that it cynically accepted the corruption and indecency of the Restoration world as the norm. Of course we do not find all of these characteristics in all Restoration comedies, but it is clear that Sheridan's The Rivals is a direct descendant of the Restoration comedies of Dryden, Wycherly, and Congreve.

Between Restoration comedy and comedy at the time of Sheridan there is, however, a pronounced decline in the worth of English drama. Eighteenth-century drama is, on the whole, lacking in both literary interest and quality; this decline reached its lowest point in the first part of the nineteenth century, which produced many tragedies that today we think of as simply ludicrous. At the end of the seventeenth century the growing immorality of drama was attacked by Jeremy Collier in his Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage (1698). At the same time the rise of the English middle class eventually forced English drama into a pattern which was thoroughly sentimental and moral. By "sentimental" here is meant, as David Daiches puts it (Critical History of English Literature), "the mixing and even interrupting of action with frequent displays and expressions of pity and other emotions indicating a tender mind and a heart easily moved"; "moral" here means "the equally frequent expression of edifying generalization, sometimes self-congratulatory, sometimes reproving, as well as a plot calculated to show virtue rewarded and vice frustrated." Such dramatists as Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan were, generally, able to rise above such tendencies, but not always.

Note, in this respect, Sheridan's comments on the sentimental and the moral in the Prologue spoken by Mrs. Bulkley (text, pp. xx-xxi). From the youthful figure of Comedy, he tells us, we should not expect to be either taught or preached to, since "grey experience" is not suited to youth, nor are solemn sentiments. And further:

> Bid her be grave, those lips should rebel prove
> To every theme that slanders mirth or love. (ll. 17-18)

Then he asks the rhetorical question: should comedy be replaced by "the sentimental muse"? Note that the emblems of this "muse" are John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, that most puritannical novel which tells the story of sinful man's journey from earth through various temptations to the New Jerusalem; and "a sprig of rue," a bitter herb, the name of which has in our time come to mean regret, sorrow. In the last few lines of the Prologue Sheridan states that morality has no need for the little help which comedy might afford her; it is, rather, tragedy which can help in this regard:

> Can our light scenes add strength to holy laws!
> Such puny patronage but hurts the cause:
> Fair virtue scorns our feeble aid to ask;
> And moral truth disdains the trickster's mask.
> For here their favourite stands [-pointing to Tragedy], whose brow,severe
> And sad, claims youth's respect, and pity's tear. (ll. 37-42)

Hence, contrary to much of the drama of his age, Sheridan will neither give way to maudlin sentiment nor attempt to moralize; at least this is what we are led to expect before the play itself begins. It remains to be seen if he realized his objectives.

III. The Rivals: Theme

The theme of Sheridan's play is really one of the oldest conflicts known to man: the male's pursuit of the female. The female resists, of course, even if she is attracted to her pursuer, in order to maintain at least a semblance of independent spirit. If there really is attraction she will give in, but she must do so honorably, at least in part on her own terms; in a manner of speaking she must seem to surrender, not simply to abandon the fort. This brief description of courting, as it is carried on in most of Western civilization, is obviously applicable to this play. The rivals referred to by the title are of course the same man: Ensign Beverley and Captain Absolute. The romantic hero has introduced himself to the romantic heroine under false colors--he has demoted himself for this purpose from Captain Absolute to Ensign Beverley. Why this subterfuge? Because he knows quite well the excessively romantic side of his loved one's character. As he describes his problem to Faulkland: "Though I am convinced my little Lydia would elope with me as Ensign Beverley, yet am I by no means certain that she would take me with the impediment of our friends' [Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony] consent, a regular humdrum wedding, and the reversion of a good fortune on my side: no, no; I must prepare her gradually for the discovery, and make myself necessary to her, before I risk it" (p. 18). Earlier, Lydia had explained her side of the question to Julia, who had just been objecting that "you tell me he is but an ensign, and you have thirty thousand pounds," Lydia replied that "you know I lose most of my fortune if I marry without my aunt's consent, till of age; and that is what I have determined to do, ever since I knew the penalty. Nor could I love the man who would wish to wait a day for the alternative" (p. 8). In these two passages we see pretty well the heart of the play: it is concerned with love, and with all the problems so often attendant on love; on Lydia's side the love is to be of the highly romanticized sort, whereas Absolute we might call the realistic lover; and, finally, this courtship is to be carried on at least in great part by means of subterfuge, of disguise. This statement about the heart of the play is obviously an over-simplification, and there are other points which must be taken into account as well, even though they are not of quite the same importance. Nevertheless the center of the play is in these elements. And, of course, we musn't forget comedy.

The world of The Rivals turns on love. Ensign Beverley is in love with Lydia and so is Captain Absolute; Faulkland is in love with Julia Melville; Mrs. Malaprop is in love with Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and Sir Lucius is in love with what he thinks is a pretty young thing named Delia; Bob Acres is in love simply with living, and he is enthusiastically seconded in this by David, his servant--but on the other hand Sir Lucius is in love with duelling, an effective means of bringing about the state of non-living; and Sir Anthony seems to be in love with everything, especially if he can do a bit of roaring and knee-slapping about it.

Just how sincere is the love of Lydia Languish? Since it is so laden with the trappings of fictionalized romance, an accurate reply may not be possible, at least not when we are dealing with the first part of the play. Her ideas about love have been formulated from her reading of novels. Look at the kinds of books she reads (p. 10): Smollett's Peregrine Pickle and Roderick Random, two realistic adventure novels which deal mainly with lower life; Henry Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling, in which tears are shed no fewer than forty-seven times; The Innocent Adultery, a title which speaks for itself; and so on. She also reveals, in the second scene, that since she and Absolute have never had a lovers' quarrel, and since she is "afraid he would never give me an opportunity," she precipitated one. Later, when Absolute implores her to "come to me--rich only thus--in loveliness! Bring no portion to me but thy love. . . for well you know it is the only dower your poor Beverley can repay," she replies, in an aside, "how charming will poverty be with him" (p. 49). A moment later, after more soulful entreaties from Absolute, Lydia says to herself "Now could I fly with him to the antipodes! but my persecution is not yet come to a crisis." She seems sincerely in love, but still, her avowal of reciprocal affection must await the "appropriate" moment.

Even more surprising, and more indicative of the nature of her love, is her reaction when Captain Absolute reveals to her, Sir Anthony, and Mrs. Malaprop that he and Beverley are the same: "So!--there will be no elopement after all!" she says, sullenly and disgustedly. There is, finally, the delightful passage when Lydia explains to Julia her disappointed hopes now that Absolute has revealed himself:

> Lydia. Why, is it not provoking? when I thought we were coming to the prettiest distress imaginable, to find myself made a mere Smithfield bargain of at last! There had I projected one of the most sentimental elopements!--so becoming a disguise!--so amiable a ladder of ropes!--Conscious moon--four horses--Scotch parson--with such surprise to Mrs. Malaprop--and such paragraphs in the newspapers!--Oh, I shall die with disappointment!
>
> Julia. I don't wonder at it!
>
> Lydia. Now--sad reverse!--what have I to expect, but, after a deal of flimsy preparation, with a bishop's license, and my aunt's blessing, to go simpering up to the altar; or perhaps be cried three times in a country church, and have an unmannerly fat clerk ask the consent of every butcher in the parish to join John Absolute and Lydia Languish, spinster! Oh that I should live to hear myself called spinster!

> Julia. Melancholy, indeed!
>
> Lydia. How mortifying, to remember the dear delicious shifts I used to be put to, to gain half a minute's conversation with this fellow! How often have I stole forth, in the coldest night in January, and found him in the garden, stuck like a dripping statue! There would he kneel to me in the snow, and sneeze and cough so pathetically! he shivering with cold and I with apprehension! and while the freezing blast numbed our joints, how warmly would he press me to pity his flame, and glow with mutual ardour!--Ah, Julia, that was something like being in love. (pp. 80-81)

Note especially Lydia's last sentence; it summarizes her whole attitude toward love--something one should experience only in the best "romantic" manner.

The love between Julia and Faulkland is also a very romantic one, but in a manner different from that of Lydia and Absolute. We might say that Lydia is concerned especially with romantic actions--courting, elopement, humble wedding, life of poverty--whereas Julia is concerned with romantic emotions and, especially, with the manner of expressing them. She never addresses Faulkland but in the most stilted, exaggerated manner. Here, for example: "My soul is opprest with sorrow at the nature of your misfortune: had these adverse circumstances arisen from a less fatal cause I should have felt strong comfort in the thought that I could now chase from your bosom every doubt of the warm sincerity of my love" (p. 76). And so on. This passage is Julia's answer to Faulkland's disclosure that he has become involved in a quarrel and must now leave the country immediately. Faulkland is lying, of course, but still it is evident that he is in the grip of a strong emotion; however, note that, even as emotionally worked up as he is, he expresses himself in much the same exaggerated manner as Julia does: "You see before you a wretch, whose life is forfeited. Nay, start not!--the infirmit of my temper has drawn all this misery on me. . . . O Julia, had I been so fortunate as to have called you mine entirely, before this mischance had fallen on me, I should not so deeply dread this banishment!"

Perhaps the most romantic thing about this couple is the event which brought about their love: Faulkland had saved Julia from drowning after her boat had capsized. This is the romantic cliché at its worst. It is also the event which sets the tone for their silly, sentimentalized relationship throughout the play. Faulkland is the epitome of the vacillating, heart-on-his-sleeve lover. When, for example, Absolute asks him what apprehensions he might have about his Julia, whom Faulkland supposes is still back home, Faulkland replies: "What grounds for apprehension, did you say? Heavens! are there not a thousand! I fear for her spirits--her health--her life!. . . . and for her health, does not every hour bring me cause to be alarmed? If it rains, some shower may even then have chilled her delicate frame! If the wind be keen, some rude blast may have affected her! The heat of noon, the dews of the evening, may endanger the life of her for whom only I value mine." (p. 19)

The other "amorous" relationships in the play are all quite secondary, but let us note them briefly. Mrs. Malaprop's love for Sir Lucius O'T rigger labors under a double error: she writes to him using the name Delia and passing herself off as young and pretty, and he makes the mistake of believing that Lydia (who really is young and pretty) is actually his loved one. When he finally meets his "Delia" face to face and is told the truth, his first reaction is a contemptuous "You Delia--pho! pho! be easy" (p. 94). But he accepts his disappointment gracefully (p. 96), hoping that he will have "the satisfaction of seeing other people succeed better." Bob Acres is "in love!" so to speak, with simply staying alive. Sir Lucius is able to work up enough courage in him so that he will uphold his honor in the duel, but he obviously has no heart for it; the first opportunity given him to get out of fighting is seized frantically. In spite of his protestations to the contrary, Bob certainly agrees with his servant's comment that the surest way of not disgracing one's ancestors is to keep out of their company as long as possible. (p. 58) For his part, Sir Lucius has an inordinate fondness for duels, and not just for the formality of the duel, i.e. the two combatants deliberately missing with their shots but nevertheless saving their honor by the very act of participating. Bob wants a space of thirty-eight or forty yards between dualists, but Sir Lucius replies contemptuously: "Pho! pho! nonsense! three or four feet between the mouths of your pistols is as good as a mile" (p. 87). He obviously wants to see blood shed. With Sir Anthony we have the heartiest person in the play, one who, like Bob Acres, is "in love" with life--but there is all the difference in the world between them. The convention of the hearty, coarse, crude, roaring father, patriarch of the clan, so to speak, is an old one in English literature, perhaps best exemplified by Squire Western in Fielding's Tom Jones; and Sir Anthony does his best to uphold the tradition. He is quite the absolute master, and will brook insubordination from no one, including his son, that "young puppy" Jack. His manner is most hearty and he is usually quite jovial, but often the slightest hint of opposition to his will brings forth a prophetic "Zounds! I shall be in a frenzy!" Even this kind of remark, however, represents simply one side of the man's character, a character unusual in its extreme zest for life and for the good things of man's existence, including pretty young girls.

Love, according to both its usual meaning and in a more general sense, is obviously the principal theme of the play. There is another, though, which, if of less importance, still merits at least a brief glance.

The theme of deceit and ignorance is introduced in the first words of the play, with Fag telling Thomas about Captain Absolute's duplicity towards Lydia Languish; the very fact that Fag tells Thomas about his master's actions is in itself dishonest, as Fag swears to Absolute that he has revealed nothing (p. 17). In the second scene we find out that Lydia has been carrying on a secret correspondence with Ensign Beverley but that they have been found out by her aunt--and the aunt herself, using a pseudonym, has fallen in love with an Irish baronet. At the end of this same scene Lucy, alone on stage, informs us of all the falsehoods she has been guilty of, and, of course, everyone is ignorant of her true nature. There are the numerous deceits practiced by Absolute, aside from the principal one towards his future wife: for example, he lies to his father in telling him that he has come to Bath in order to recruit soldiers; then, after Absolute has found out that the woman his father wants him to marry is his own Lydia, he hypocritically tells Sir Anthony that he has resolved "to sacrifice every inclination of my own to your satisfaction" and marry the woman (p. 37); this is followed immediately by his profession of ignorance concerning the identity of this Miss Lydia Languish. Later, he complicates things even further by telling Lydia that he (Beverley) has passed himself off on her aunt as one Captain Absolute, the man whom it has been decided she is to marry.

Falsehood of another kind is practiced by Bob Acres. For one thing, he is almost able to convince himself that he has "the valour of St. George and the dragon to boot" (p. 59); then he asks Absolute if he will tell Beverley, with whom he is to fight the duel, that "I generally kill a man a week; will you, Jack?" (p. 61); this is, of course, as monstrous a lie as is told in the entire play. Mrs. Malaprop also tells a "whopper," in trying to pass herself off on Sir Lucius as young and dainty. In sum, then, deceit and ignorance play a key role in the delineation of characters and the development of plot.

As our last word on the idea of theme in The Rivals, let us look briefly at what Sheridan wants us to believe is the moral of his play. Using Mrs. Bulkley (who played Julia in the first presentation) as his spokesman, we learn from the Epilogue that "'one moral's plain,'" to the effect that "love gilds the scene, and women guide the plot." And furthermore, "from every rank obedience is our due." Were it not for this outright statement of a moral, it would be pretty difficult to deduce one from the play itself. In a play such as Oedipus or Macbeth, or, for that matter, in most tragedies, there is a definite moral lesson to be observed by the audience. The tragedian does not necessarily have to write by the eighteenth-century credo of "first instruct, then please"; nevertheless, from human striving, failure, and suffering, there is some kind of lesson to be learnt. Comedy can also teach, as the playwright points out man's follies and stupidities, and the extent to which man simply makes a fool of himself. But The Rivals is not this kind of comedy. Sheridan's moral, as stated in the Epilogue, to the effect that women "guide the plot," and that obedience is due to them from all men, is obviously not to be taken seriously; note that the first two lines refer to the poet's having said that he would "try to coax some moral from his play," and in the Prologue he had referred to comedy as too light a vehicle to deal with morality--"fair virtue scorns our feeble aid to ask."

To put this whole matter in a few words, The Rivals does not have a moral, and hence a consideration of the thematic structure of this play should view the author's references to the moral lesson of a play as simply his comic bow to a convention of eighteenth century drama that was already dead.

IV. Point of View:

Perhaps the best way to approach the question of point of view in The Rivals is to deal with one of the lowest common denominators of the elusive comic Genre, satire. For some satiric overtones can be found in practically all comedy, with the possible exception of the cotton-candy romance of total wish-fulfillment. If, as Aristotle tells us, comedy aims at representing men as worse than in real life; and if much of the emphasis in comedy is on the blocking characters who obstruct the hero's desires; then clearly both its form and purpose make comedy readily adaptable to satire.

The comedy of manners, which is what The Rivals is, is concerned with the manners and conventions of a highly sophisticated, artificial society. The fashions and outlooks of this social group are reflected in the drama, and many of them held up to ridicule. While we have said that Sheridan is not moralizing, and while no character gives direct expression to any of Sheridan's satiric themes, nonetheless some of his satiric targets are obvious enough.

There is, of course, the satire of sentimental capriciousness in both of the romantic plots. The reason for Absolute's adopting his disguise as Beverley is Lydia's desire for "sentimental elopements," with their paraphernalia of disguise, rope ladders, and Scotch parsons. In the other plot it is the man, Faulkland, who exhibits the caprice. Lydia's excess of romanticism nearly destroys her union with Absolute; and Faulkland (a less comic figure: the neurotic self-doubter) becomes his own worst rival. There is the satire of the custom of the duel, given expression by David in Act IV in words reminiscent of Falstaff's reflections on honor in Henry IV, Part I. There is the satire of the eighteenth century sentimental comedy, carried mainly by the Julia-Faulkland plot. None of this is heavy or Juvenalian in tone, but the satire of customs, codes, and attitudes is apparent throughout.

It would be unwise,however, to seek too deeply into The Rivals for Sheridan's point of view, if conceived of as a philosophic attitude or moral stance. While the comedy of manners can be the vehicle for searching criticism of society (Molière's The Misanthrope comes to mind), the most benefit for the purposes of this curriculum will probably be derived from a study of the form of the play.

V. The Rivals: Form

The Rivals demonstrates quite clearly the use of the same sort of architecture and the same sort of characters which have characterized the comic genre ever since the development of the "New Comedy" in ancient Greece.

It has been suggested that tragedy consists in the isolation of the protagonist from society, and that comedy consists in the integration of the protagonist with society (or the creation of a new society more in accord with the protagonist's goals). We may see the expulsion from the new society of the ritual scapegoat (that character who is not reconciled to the new power-structure centering around the protagonist) but the general tendency is to include as many of the characters as possible in the new order at the end of the play. Thus the tradition of "the happy ending," of the integration of society.

The basic plot structure of the sort of comedy we are dealing with is that a young man wants a young lady, that this goal is obstructed by some sort of opposition, and that finally the obstruction is removed, the hero gets his way, and all are reconciled to the new state of affairs. The blocking characters are nearly always older, and most frequently parental (Sir Anthony) or in loco parentis (Mrs. Malaprop). This explains the recurrence of the stock figure of drama, story, and folk tale of the senex iratus or irate father, among the many other stock figures with which comedy abounds.

The overcoming of the blocking characters by the hero constitutes the main action of comedy. As Northrup Frye puts it (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 163), "At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero. . . . The appearance of this new society is frequently signalized by some kind of party or festive ritual, which either appears at the end of the play or is assumed to take place immediately afterward." The most frequent festive ritual is of course the wedding: "They got married and lived happily ever after" is the basic comic formula.

After the climactic scene in which the power begins to shift from the blocking characters to the hero, we get what in comedy corresponds to the descending action and the dénouement of tragedy, in which the action follows to its conclusion, all the loose ends are tied up, as many people as possible are reconciled, and the play draws to its festive close.

Such is clearly the pattern that is being followed in The Rivals. Examination of its structure immediately reveals a main romantic plot, a sub-plot in serio-romantic counterpoint, sufficient minor narrative to provide further comic complication, and the necessary machinery of the duel which serves to get everyone on stage for the reconciliation. The main narrative follows the classic comic pattern precisely: Jack Absolute is in love with Lydia; the blocking characters include the parental figures of Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop; the overcoming of the obstacles establishes a new society with the lovers dominant, everyone reconciled, and Bob Acres' party to celebrate.

The action of the play is introduced and complicated by other time-honored devices, which can be traced back at least as far as Plautus and Terence. As so frequently happens, we are given the necessary information by the convention of two servants talking about their masters. The action is complicated by the old convention of mistaken identity or disguise. Much comedy depends on twins, or even pairs of twins, or on girls disguised as boys, or vice versa; or, as in The Rivals, with one man assuming a double identity. Illusion and reality, if you wish.

It is the mistaken identity that provides the motivation for the action of the play, both the verbal and situational ironies that abound. With the exception of the very slight Delia plot, all the action evolves from Jack Absolute's alias. Mrs. Malaprop lets Beverley (Absolute) in to see Lydia; Acres challenges Beverley and sends the message by Absolute. The scenes of cross-purpose conversation between Absolute and Sir Anthony depend to a large extent on the same basic disguise, as does the irony of Absolute being commanded by his father to marry the girl with whom (as Beverley) he is planning to elope.

It is the exposure of the disguise to the principals that constitutes the climax of the play, and which corresponds to the "recognition" scene of Aristotelian tragedy. Everything unwinds from this climax. It comes very late in the play, Act IV, scene 2. There is only one scene left in Act IV, and Act V is very short, serving mainly to get all the actors on the duelling field for the reconciliation.

This placing of the climax towards the end of the play has the effect of throwing most of the emphasis onto the blocking action, expanding the role of Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony, prolonging the suspense of the deceptior and wringing as much humor as possible out of the situation and the blocking characters.

Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony are, of course, types or stock characters, and should be recognized as such by the students--although their limited reading background may force them to take this on the teacher's sayso. They are what E. M. Forster has called the "flat" character, and are closely related to the "humor" characters of Ben Jonson's plays. The are dominated by a single ruling characteristic, and their response to any situation is totally predictable because absolutely constant. In The Rivals their names classify them. Sir Anthony is the type of the senex iratus; Mrs. Malaprop the type of the simpering and flirtatious older woman, characterized here by the uproarious misuse of the language which has added her name to the common nouns of our language--malapropisms. (Many students will not have sufficient vocabulary to observe all or even some of her malapropisms--point some of them out, but don't belabor them).

This domination by a single ruling characteristic--this "humor" in the Elizabethan sense--makes the blocking characters comic or absurd. They are thus not only fit figures for satire but also serve to direct our sympathy towards the protagonist. They are also impediments to the smooth working of society, as is any rigid and uncompromising figure. If they can be reconciled and converted, they are assimilated into the new society which forms at the end of the play; if not, they are rejected.

This play should serve as a good introduction to comic drama. In it the skeletal structure is quite obvious, and the basic form emerges with very little digging. It lends itself to comparison with tragedy particularly well, and so should prove valuable for discussion of tragic and comic patterns. While it is not the only kind of comedy, it is certainly one of the most basic, and its "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy get girl" pattern will be familiar to all students. We will find a comedy of a different sort when we get to Major Barbara, where Shaw is definitely writing thesis comedy, but a thorough understanding of this basic comic structure will serve as a good jumping-off place for comparative analysis.

LITERATURE CURRICULUM V

Major Barbara

Teacher Version

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LITERATURE CURRICULUM V

Major Barbara

Teacher Version

I. The Decline of English Drama.

A brief look at English literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is enough to show us that these periods are remarkable both for the quantity and for the extraordinary quality of the works published. Even the most superficial view of the first part of the eighteenth century can show us such major works as, for example, Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock and An Essay on Man, Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, and Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels. A bit later in the century we find such first-rate works as Samuel Richardson's Pamela, Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, Dr. Johnson's Dictionary; and, to mention just a few of the major writers at the end of this age, we have Laurence Sterne, Thomas Gray, Henry Smollett, William Blake, and Robert Burns. In the first part of the nineteenth century we have, of course, the Romantic poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats; the major novelists are Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Then the Victorian poets--Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold; the novelists Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, the two Brontës, and George Eliot. A fairly large number of other major literary figures could easily be added to this list.

But where are the dramatists? Where are the first-rate plays of this long period? The answer is, simply, that there was very little drama of either the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries which has literary quality. There were exceptions, of course, all the more remarkable because of their scarcity. We can note John Gay's The Beggars Opera (1728), Henry Fielding's hilarious Tom Thumb the Great (1730), Oliver Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer (1773), and, of course, Sheridan's The Rivals (1775). But on the other hand the drama of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century is today of interest only to the literary historian. Even the master poets of the age tried their hand at drama: Wordsworth's The Borderers (1796), Coleridge's Remorse (1813), Byron's Manfred (1817), Shelley's The Cenci (1819), Browning's Strafford (1837), Tennyson's Becket (1879). But in spite of the eminence of the authors these plays are read today only by specialists in the literature of the period, and they are never seen on stage.

The reasons for this serious decline of English drama are complicated and still not thoroughly understood; but we can look at a few of them that will help to illuminate the problem. In the last part of the sixteenth century and throughout most of the seventeenth, drama held a central position. But the middle part of the eighteenth century saw the advent of major works of fiction. These novels, published in an age when the printed book was becoming more cheaply available, and available to a rapidly increasing audience, tended to draw some of the audience away from the stage. At the same time the managers of the theatrical companies were gradually assuming more power, including that of deciding which plays were to be performed. Their principal criterion of success was not the dramatic excellence of the play, but rather the results (or lack of them) obtained at the box-office. Hence the managers tended to present those plays which would have the widest appeal. In a sense the same situation existed then which prevails in our time with regard to television entertainment: the programs are directed at the largest possible audience; it seems that, almost by definition, such an audience is that of the lowest common denominator. A further parallel can be made with regard to the "star" system: many television programs are created for a specific actor, and the principal emphasis of the program is not on setting, or delineation of character, or plot, but rather on the character of the star--everything is ordained in such a manner as to give this one person the most exposure possible. The same kind of comment can be made about many operas, which sacrifice the over-all character of the story and the music for an exaggerated emphasis on the kind of song which best "shows off" one particular type of voice, or, as also is often the case, one particular singer. The situation of drama in the eighteenth century is a fairly close parallel to that of television today: it was an age remarkable for its great actors and actresses; unfortunately, however, the age of the great actor was achieved at the expense of the play itself.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, drama and literature had little to do with each other, there was little reciprocal influence between them. Such an influence in the ages of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Congreve had been of great benefit to both, but in the times of such literary giants as Wordsworth and Tennyson, of Scott and Dickens, the best that the drama could offer was burlesque, crude farce, and formularized melodrama.

What we may call, with some justification, the "renaissance" of English drama began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, with playwrights such as Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929), Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934), and W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911). Jones and Pinero brought to the treatment of moral problems a frankness and sophistication which had rarely been seen on the English stage during the previous one hundred and fifty years, whereas Gilbert's energy and rhetorical brilliance were a most welcome antidote to the pretentious, pompous rhetoric of Victorian and earlier drama. To speak in rather general terms, the fusion of the sophisticated drama of Wing and Pinero and of the brilliance of Gilbert, with a strong dose of satire, culminates in the plays of George Bernard Shaw.

II. Shaw the Dramatist

Stephen Undershaft, the munitions-maker--philosopher--moralist, is a man for whom Shaw obviously had much sympathy. Undershaft is completely rational in his attitude toward gunpowder, life, killing, business; he does admit to Cusins, half-way through the second act, that he loves Barbara "with a father's love"; but then, near the end of the play, to Cusins's "may I not love even my father-in-law?" Undershaft replies brutally "Who wants your love, man? By what right do you take the liberty of offering it to me? I will have your due heed and respect, or I will kill you. But your love! Damn your impertinence!" (page 146). Allowing for a bit of exaggeration, this passage is typical of Shaw's unromantic attitude toward life, of his imperious desire to see life precisely, with its surface layers of hypocrisy, romanticism, convention, and pretense all quite stripped off, leaving nothing but truth.

Before becoming a playwright Shaw spent his early years preoccupied with a variety of interests: he was a Socialist reformer, after having spent his youth in miserable circumstances in London; he published five novels, one of which (Cashel Byron's Profession, 1882) had some success; he was a journalist, a publicist, and, especially, a music critic, the first of his endeavors to draw wide public attention. He was also a drama critic for some time before becoming a playwright. As a result of this wide and varied background Shaw's general philosophy of life was formulated, to be given fairly specific expression in such works as his study of the great Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891), and such plays as Arms and the Man (1894) and Man and Superman (1903).

We can say that, in general, Shaw's attitude toward life is antiromantic--antiromantic in the sense that he wanted to strip the romantic,conventional, idealized, superficial cover off man and show him precisely as he is. In the Preface to Arms and the Man (which is subtitled "An Anti-Romantic Comedy") Shaw put it this way: "Idealism, which is only a flattering name for romance in politics and morals, is as obnoxious to me as romance in ethics or religion. In spite of a Liberal Revolution or two, I can no longer be satisfied with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty, cupidity, and all the other commonplaces of civilization which drive men to the theatre to make foolish pretences that such things are progress, science, morals, religion, patriotism, imperial supremacy, national greatness and all the other names the newspapers call them."

In addition to the anti-romantic Shaw we must consider Shaw the social critic. To put it very simply, he did not like many of the aspects of life which he saw about him in those years at the turn of the century. Hence he wrote plays which dealt with what were to him the major problems of his time--for example, prostitution, the hypocrisy of society, religious cant, poor housing, etc. And he dealt with these problems in such a bold and striking fashion that the audiences of the time were rudely shocked into an awareness not only that the problems existed (which was sometimes common knowledge) but that they existed in specific manners, with causes which Shaw spelt out in detail, and with solutions which he dealt with in equally precise terms. Shaw felt so strongly about many such problems that he can often be accused of exaggerating both the problem and the solution. When, for example, in Act II of Major Barbara, Undershaft states that the only two things necessary to Salvation are money and gunpowder, and that honor, justice, truth, love, and mercy are merely "the graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life," we must not take this as being the complete Shavian philosophy on the question. Shaw's purpose was to irritate society into an awareness of its inherent stupidities, and one way to do this was to exaggerate these faults. In a letter to his friend A. B. Walkley, which serves as the Preface to Man and Superman, Shaw commented that "it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable; and I insist on making them think in order to bring them to conviction of sin. If you don't like my preaching you must lump it. I really cannot help it."

Shaw's fifty-three plays cannot, of course, be summarized in a few words (or probably not at all); still, his "I insist on making them think" is very relevant to Major Barbara. This play is in the category of what one critic has called the Discussion Play; the subject of discussion here is morality--religious morality, particularly in regard to Barbara's struggle with herself; and social morality, particularly in regard to Undershaft's relationship with the world, for the destruction of which he provides the means. The ideas under discussion were very relevant when the play was first produced, in 1905; tje play is still relevant in our own time, since the idea of the religious struggle, of seeking to achiev religious certainty, is probably almost as old as man himself; as well, the idea of blowing up people was never as important even in Shaw's time as it has become in our own. Discussion of the problems presented by the play involves different, even contradictory, points of view, and it is here, of course, that the playwright's insistence on making us think becomes most obvious. For example, Barbara's ideas, her attitude towards life, is that which would be followed (or at least approved of) by the majority of theatre-goers, whereas Undershaft's cold-hearted selling of munitions to whoever wants to blow up someone else would certainly draw the average man's condemnation. But we are dealing here only with abstract ideas, whereas in the play the ideas are closely associated with different human beings, and hence the ideas become "colored," so to speak, by the character of the person advocating them. Hence, when Undershaft easily triumphs in his discussions about morality with Barbara and Cusins, we are not quite so shocked as we would be if, for example, the two sides of the question were presented to us, say, in printed form, as briefly-stated philosophical discussions. In this case, the errors of Undershaft's thinking would be quite obvious; but such errors are not at all so obvious when we see them argued by a fully developed character, a character whose gentleness and kind understanding immediately attract our sympathy from the time we first see him on stage. Furthermore, we can add to this point (as we shall see later in more detail) that Shaw has obviously "loaded" the discussion in Undershaft's favor.

Where, then, does this leave the audience? Precisely in the state Shaw wanted: an audience thinking. The theater-goer whole-heartedly agrees with Barbara's arguments about the horror of making the instruments of death, but no one on stage is quite able to contradict Undershaft's logically stated position. The audience feels that Undershaft's position is wrong, somehow, and that it certainly can logically be refuted, but as soon as Barbara or Cusins advances an objection to Undershaft's theories, he promptly dismantles it. Perhaps, then, we should look a bit more closely at the playwright's point of view.

After a first quick reading of this play one feels that formulating Shaw's point of view is a fairly simple matter; a second reading, however, shows that some points, which had at first appeared simple enough and straightforward, are not quite as simple as all that. The problem becomes even more complicated when one takes into account the Preface, for we must remember also that what an artist says he is going to do in a play is not necessarily what he achieves in the play itself; we should, of course, give the dramatist the benefit of the doubt, remembering that our literary frame of reference is usually not as wide or profound as his, and also that we may not interpret his work with quite the same nuances of feeling and meaning which he would deem necessary.

In that part of the Preface entitled "The Gospel of St. Andrew Undershaft" Shaw tells us quite emphatically that here is what we (the critics) should say about his play. His main point is this: "In the millionaire Undershaft I have represented a man who has become intellectually and spiritually as well as practically conscious of the irresistible natural truth which we all abhor and repudiate: to wit, that the greatest of our evils, and the worst of our crimes is poverty, and that our first duty, to which every other consideration should be sacrificed, is not to be poor." (p. 15) We must interpret this correctly: Undershaft is conscious of the natural truth which we (humanity in general) repudiate--that the greatest evil is poverty, and that our first duty is not to be poor. Undershaft's adherence to this philosophy of life is quite clear. For example, in the second act he makes several references to it: to Cusins he says "if you wish to know, as the long days go, that to live is happy, you must first acquire money enough for a decent life" (p. 94); and a moment later "leave it to the poor to pretend that poverty is a blessing" (p. 97); he proposes to Cusins that, although he cannot buy off Barbara, he can buy the Salvation Army; and the last part of the second act is mainly a consideration of money: Undershaft's gift of 5,000 pounds to meet Bodger's, and Barbara's subsequent leaving of the Salvation Army. We see this same point being made in the third act, when everyone goes out to inspect Perivale St. Andrews and the munitions factory:

> Barbara. Well?
> Cusins. Not a ray of hope. Everything perfect! wonderful! real! It only needs a cathedral to be a heavenly city instead of a hellish one. (p. 129)

Cusins's reference to there being no "ray of hope" refers to the fact that he and Barbara had come to the town for the specific purpose of being able to condemn Undershaft: they would find, they had expected, a filthy, smoke-ridden, horrible little town reeking of filth, and almost swimming in the blood of the oppressed workers; what they see, though, is quite a shocking revelation to them.

A strong statement of this "money gospel" occurs when Undershaft states that he had saved Barbara's soul because of his money: "I enabled Barbara to become Major Barbara; and I saved her from the crime of poverty" (p. 141); and in the passage following he makes his point in considerable detail, culminating in his accusation of the Salvation Army: "It is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other" (p. 142). However, the climax of Shaw's "money gospel" occurs in the last few moments of the play, when we see that Barbara herself has been in part "converted" to the Undershaft philosophy; she tells Cusins, "Undershaft and Bodger: their hands stretch everywhere: when we feed a starving fellow creature, it is with their bread, because there is no other bread; when we tend the sick, it is in the hospitals they endow; if we turn from the churches they build, we must kneel on the stones of the streets they pave. As long as that lasts, there is no getting away from them. Turning our backs on Bodger and Undershaft is turning our backs on life" (p. 151). As Shaw puts it in the Preface, in a typically exaggerated sentence, "the evil to be attacked is not sin, suffering, greed, priestcraft, kingcraft, demagogy, monopoly, ignorance, drink, war, pestilence, nor any other of the scapegoats which reformers sacrifice, but simply poverty" (p. 22).

Shaw's anti-romantic attitude toward religion is strongly emphasized in Major Barbara, sometimes even coming close to satire. Adolphus Cusins, the drum-beating professor of Greek, is a symbolic figure who strongly suggests the author's feelings about religion. We can pretty well see Shaw speaking for himself when he has Cusins reply, to Lady Britomart's pronouncement that they are about to say the evening prayers, that "you would have to say before all the servants that we have done things we ought not to have done, and left undone things we ought to have done. . . . I flatly deny it: I have done my best" (p. 73). Undershaft also speaks for Shaw about religion, although his gospel of "money and gunpowder. Freedom and power. Command of life and command of death" (p. 96) is again Shaw exaggerating.

A few other points are worthy of notice. At the end of Act II Barbara despairs: "Drunkenness and Murder! My God: why hast thou forsaken me?" She is referring, of course, to the five thousand-pound gifts of Bodger and Undershaft (liquor and guns) to the Salvation Army, gifts which, she feels, are of tainted money; she cannot accept them, and since everyone else feels they are quite legitimate, Barbara feels betrayed and forsaken. The final insult is added by Bill Walker's taunting "Wot prawce selvytion nah?" Bill is firmly convinced that the Army has compromised itself because of money; there is nothing Barbara can say in reply.

In the first two acts Cusins seems quite sincere about the attraction the Salvation Army has for him; replying to Undershaft's accusation that "that drum of yours is hollow" he says "I am a sincere Salvationist" (p. 93). Yet in Act III (the next day) in reply to Barbara's "Would you have joined if you had never seen me?" he can only stammer "Well --er--well, possibly, as a collector of religions--" (p. 117). Hence we can conclude only that, as far as religion is concerned, Cusins is somewhat of a hypocrite, or perhaps opportunist would be a better word.

What, then, in the final analysis is Shaw's point of view in Major Barbara? He has taken Undershaft, a man who makes his living by producing the instruments of death, and has had him express a philosophy of life, of duty, which are only disguises for his true interest--himself. Barbara is a sincere salvationist who is a bit too idealistic at the beginning; at the end of the play she comes to reconcile her earlier idealistic world with the true world of money she has come to know. But her reconciliation has been brought about by her father: it was he who caused Barbara to leave the Army when his large gift was accepted by Mrs. Baines. Then he has her brought to Perivale St. Andrews, where, unlike her mother--who felt she must have all the linen and china and kitchen ranges--Barbara feels that she must have not the material comforts of this city but the souls, and "not weak souls in starved bodies, sobbing with gratitude for a scrap of bread and treacle, but fullfed, quarrelsome, snobbish, uppish creatures, all standing on their little rights and dignities. . . . That is where salvation is really wanted. My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread. I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake" (p. 152). Barbara will continue her work of saving souls--but in the city where lies the "factory of death."

III. Major Barbara: Form

Speaking in general terms we can divide Major Barbara into two main sections: 1) the first two acts, concerned mainly with Barbara's struggle for souls--her own and others; 2) Undershaft's attempts to convince Cusins of the worth of the munitions enterprise.

Barbara clearly dominates the first two acts. After the introductory discussion between Stephen and Lady Britomart, which sets the scene and gives us information about the family background, everyone gathers around the mother for her announcement that their father is coming to visit them. To her mother's statement that she hopes Barbara will not object, Barbara replies "why should I? My father has a soul to be saved like anybody else" (p. 63). The answer is typical of Barbara's intense preoccupation with her religious duties. Although Undershaft has been called by Lady Britomart ostensibly to discuss money, the talk quickly changes to religion, and the religious talk ends in a mutual challenge between Barbara and her father, as she replies to his invitation to go see his cannon factory with "it may end in your giving up the cannons for the sake of the Salvation Army." But Undershaft replies "Are you sure it will not end in your giving up the Salvation Army for the sake of cannons?" (p. 72) The combat is begun.

The first part of Act II shows Barbara in her glory, taking good care of the poor and destitute, and easily subduing the bully, Bill Walker. Her attitude towards Bill wins him to her gradually, and he is just on the point of breaking down before her when Cusins's entrance, announced on his drum, breaks the spell Barbara has cast over Bill, and he is able to escape. But he is going to go spit in Todger Fairmile's face so that he will receive the same kind of treatment that he had given Jenny. As he tells Barbara, "Thatll mike us square" (p. 91).

The emphasis of the second act changes at this point. Undershaft and Cusins are alone on stage, and they immediately get into a vigorous discussion of religion, morality, and money. Undershaft's objective is to win Barbara (p. 96), and he proposes to do this by "buying" the Salvation Army (p. 98). He does so a few minutes later when he matches Bodger's gift of five thousand pounds. Mrs. Baines, the Salvation Army Commissioner, accepts Undershaft's gift as she had accepted the other; but Barbara refuses to have anything to do with money which is the profit from selling whiskey and guns. She resigns from the Army, as the others march off triumphantly to the great meeting to announce the financial success the Army has fallen heir to. Barbara is left alone with Bill Walker and Peter Shirley, forsaken, she believes, even by God; she has not even won over Bill's soul: "You wanted maw saoul, did you? Well, you aint got it." (p. 112) At the end of this first part of the play Barbara seems to have been converted even from Christianity itself, to be converted later to "The Gospel of St. Andrew Undershaft" (Preface, p. 15).

In the third act the emphasis shifts from Barbara to Undershaft and Cusins. The first scene is concerned with the Undershaft tradition, whereby the ownership of the munitions business is traditionally handed down to a foundling who assumes the Undershaft name. With an eye always to the proper marriage and expensive future life of her daughters, Lady Britomart wants the business to go to the legal heir, Stephen. Undershaft wants nothing to do with this, and Stephen also refuses, in favor of a life in politics. Undershaft makes the key statement, as he tells his wife that "if you want to keep the foundry in the family, you had better find an eligible foundling and marry him to Barbara" (p. 120). The solution to this problem will, of course, be provided in the second scene. [It should be noted here that Act III is usually divided into two scenes, although they are not so marked in our text. Scene Two begins with the stage directions at the bottom of p. 128].

The second scene opens with the enthusiastic approbation of everyone for everything they have seen in the beautiful, clean, modern town of Perivale St. Andrews. Then, by a chance remark of Lady Britomart's (she would like to manage the town, and Adolphus could look after the cannons) we are brought back again to the question of the foundling, which leads to Cusins's "confession" that his parents' marriage was considered legal in Australia, where he was born, but would not be so considered in England. Hence he is a foundling, and consequently Undershaft and Cusins immediately begin to argue about the terms under which Cusins will succeed to the ownership of the company. But now Barbara, who has remained pretty well in the background throughout all of this third act, is brought into the discussion. She is at present in a state of suspension; as she tells her father, "I was safe with an infinite wisdom watching me, an army marching to Salvation with me; and in a moment, at a stroke of your pen in a cheque book, I stood alone; and the heavens were empty. That was the first shock of the earthquake: I am waiting for the second." (p. 140) She doesn't have long to wait, as Undershaft immediately proceeds to overwhelm her with his arguments. The result, not much later, is Barbara's remark to Adolphus that "there is no wicked side: life is all one. And I never wanted to shirk my share in whatever evil must be endured, whether it be sin or suffering." (p. 151) This, of course, is a far cry from her refusal in Act II to have anything to do with the money of Bodger and Undershaft. In the last few lines of the play we can see that her change is complete. To Cusins's "then the way of life lies through the factory of death?" she replies vigorously "Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and of man to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in the Valley of the Shadow" (p. 152). Her conversion is complete.

Let us note a few of the more important points concerning the structure of this play. Barbara's cry "My God: who hast thou forsaken me?" near the end of the second act marks a dividing point. Up till then we have a play made up of both actions and discussion, but after this point there is little action, and the emphasis falls principally on discussion. We should note also that there is a two-fold progression in Barbara's career: before the play begins she has found her first vocation--the Salvation Army--saving the souls of the miserable and the destitute; but just before the play ends she has found another vocation--saving the souls of the well-off, comfortable, status-conscious workers in the munitions factory. Furthermore, she experiences two dramatic and shocking spiritual upheavals, the first after she feels that everyone has abandoned her, and the second on the occasion of her visit to Perivale St. Andrews.

The only jarring note in the structure of this play is Cusins's "confession" to the effect that, in England, he is legally considered a foundling. This is a most remarkable coincidence from several points of view: Undershaft wants to pass on the factory to a foundling, and, without knowing about Cusins's secret, he takes an immediate and pronounced liking to him; Lady Britomart insists that the business be kept in the family, and it just so happens that the man whom her daughter wants to marry (and who has the mother's approval) can be considered as proper material for the succession; Barbara, despite her strong moral convictions at the beginning, is eventually won over to her father's way of thinking, and so is her future husband, who just happens to be the inheritor of the business. This last-minute revelation of an extremely important secret is in the worst tradition of the poorer plays of the nineteenth century; but there is little else we can say in condemnation of the story because we are too busy enjoying it.

IV. Major Barbara as Discussion

Religion, business, war, morality, philosophy, theology--they are all discussed in this play, in varying degrees. A survey of some of the more important ideas will perhaps elucidate the principal points Shaw was attempting to emphasize.

The concept of conversion plays a key role here. When we first see Barbara, converting the more miserable members of the human race is the dominating element of her life, to which she is prepared to sacrifice everything, even the approval of her wealthy family, and, we feel (although the question never arises), even the love of her husband-to-be. Her attitude towards everyone in the West Ham shelter, even the sadistic Bill Walker, is one of kindness, patience, and the greatest charity. She faces the bully unflinchingly, and by means of kindness and logic almost converts him, only to be thwarted by the rather stupidly noisy arrival of her drum-beating fiancé. This raises a question: who, then, does Barbara convert to the Salvationist creed? No one, not even, in the final analysis, herself--at the end of the play she has been won over (at least in large part) to her father's way of accepting both the good and evil of this world. Her fiancé is not a true Salvationist--he admits in the third act that, had he never met Barbara, he might possibly have joined the Army "as a collector of religions." She has not, of course, converted her mother, or Sarah, or Stephen, or Lomax--there is never even any question of it. She just fails to convert Bill Walker; he leaves her with the insulting pun (on the word price) "Wot prawce selvytion nah? Snobby Prawce! Ha! Ha!" (p. 112) He is referring to two things: Undershaft's "buying" the Army by his large gift--and hence Barbara has failed miserably to convert her father; and Snobby Price, who, ostensibly on his way home to pray and await his mother, had stolen Walker's sovereign--and, of course, Barbara hasn't converted Snobby either. Both Rummy Mitchens and Snobby come to the Army simply because they are starving; they haven't the least bit of religious motive. They invent stories--"I know wot they like" says Snobby. Then, supposedly converted, he steals as he leaves the shelter on his way home to pray; and at the end of Act II Rummy squeals in triumph at Bill Walker's lost pound--vengeance and spite in the heart of the Salvation Army! As the final touch (a very ironic one) Barbara even tries to "convert" Mrs. Baines, the Salvation Army Commissioner, to come to her way of thinking, i.e., not to accept the Bodger-Undershaft gifts. But Mrs. Baines doesn't see things the same way, so Barbara fails again.

However, in spite of all these failures, Barbara's endeavors are not entirely in vain. At the end she has arrived at the conviction that there are still souls to be won, those of the prosperous munitions workers. Whatever the success of her future endeavors, there can be no doubt of her striking sincerity and energy in them.

The principal point of the entire play, that around which all the important events revolve, is no doubt the Undershaft philosophy. In spite of the extreme unconventionality of his ideas, Undershaft is not in the least apologetic about them nor at all hesitant to express them. He is even the first to introduce the topic when he has come to Lady Britomart's at the beginning of the play. Furthermore, he expounds on the nature of his work both clearly and frankly:

> Undershaft. Here I am, a profiteer in mutilation and murder. I find myself in a specially amiable humor just now because, this morning, down at the foundry, we blew twenty-seven dummy soldiers into fragments : with a gun which formerly destroyed only thirteen.

Lomax [leniently] Well, the more destructive war becomes, the sooner it will be abolished, eh?

Undershaft. Not at all. The more destructive war becomes the more fascinating we find it. No, Mr. Lomax: I am obliged to you for making the usual excuse for my trade; but I am not ashamed of it. I am not one of those men who keep their morals and their business in water-tight compartments. All the spare money my trade rivals spend on hospitals, cathedrals, and other receptacles for conscience money, I devote to experiments and researches in improved methods of destroying life and property. I have always done so; and I always shall. (pp. 70-71)

As he puts it a moment later his morality, or religion, "must have a place for cannons and torpedoes in it"; in the second act he says that his religion is being a millionaire (p. 88); that it is choosing money and gunpowder in preference to honor, justice, love (p. 93)--and so on; no single short passage can be said to be the essence of the Undershaft philosophy.

However, it is in the second scene of the last act that we see the munitions maker expounding at greatest length on his philosophy of life. A brief list of the main elements of his philosophy would go something like this:

1) he is "Unashamed" of his calling. (p. 139)
2) the armorer's faith: to sell arms to everyone, "without respect of persons or principles" (p. 138)
3) an old, broken-down religion must be scrapped for a better one, just as the armorer unhesitatingly scraps a gun that goes just slightly wrong (pp. 140-41)
4) poverty is the worst of all crimes (p. 142), and hence only money can save the soul from the seven deadly sins--food, clothing, taxes, etc. (p. 141)

And to cap all this he reminisces briefly on his former poverty--"until one day I swore that I would be a full-fed free man at all costs; that nothing should stop me except a bullet, neither reason nor morals nor the lives of other men. I said 'Thou shalt starve ere I starve'; and with that word I became free and great." (p. 143)

This last remark of Undershaft's is particularly revealing; what he is referring to is, of course, his own personal self-interest--he is concerned only with himself, not with others. Undershaft is a war profiteer, a person who earns his daily bread at the cost of the killing and brutalization of others. But throughout the play he constantly disguises his self-interest as duty; he tries to make us believe that what guides him is the principle of his business, not expediency.. But his "Thou shalt starve ere I starve" reveals the true man: he is interested solely in his own good, first, last, and always.

V. The Comic Elements

Major Barbara is not essentially a comedy, but its comic elements are fairly numerous and hence of some importance.

The theme of this play lends itself much more to tragedy than comedy: death and destruction are hardly topics from which to draw laughter; Shaw, however, has managed to deal with the serious matters in the appropriately sober manner without descending into the depths of tragedy. There is a constant interplay between the serious and the comic, handled in such a manner that the transition from one to the other, even the mixture of the semi-tragic and the comic, does not jar the audience into an awareness of incongruity.

It is Shaw's refusal to deal with potentially tragic themes in a tragic manner which lets him use both the serious and the comic moods in the same scene. For example, on page 133 Charles Lomax, after having stupidly lit a match in a high-explosives shed and been gently reprimanded, sits down beside Sarah on a huge bombshell and reassures her that "My ownest, there is no danger"; just a few lines further Lady Britomar refers, quite rightly, to the cynicism of the motto inscribed on one of the churches in the town: "No Man Is Good Enough To Be Another Man's Master." The first incident is proper material for high comedy, the second for tragedy; yet Shaw has dealt with both in such a manner as to play down their extreme applications, and hence the two incidents are logically fused not only into the same scene but even into the space of just a few moments.

The role of some of the minor characters--Bill Walker, Rummy Mitchens, Snobby Price--is in large part a comic one, even though these persons are also used to develop the theme of morality. Bill, his conscience hurting him for what he had done to Jenny, spits in Todger Fairmile's face "to gat me aown jawr browk to settisfaw you" as he tells Jenny. Todger had then knocked him down and used him as a kneeling bench while he and Mog, Bill's former girl friend, prayed for Bill's soul--"Arf the street pryed; an the tather arf larfed fit to split theirselves" (p. 102). It should be noted that Bill's language is also one of the comic elements; it comes straight from the streets inhabited by the lower classes, as do also his mentality and his sentiments. (To get the full effect of Bill's speech his words should be pronounced exactly as Shaw has spelled them). The same remarks apply to the other two characters.

Major Barbara is one of Shaw's major plays; it may eventually come to be considered his masterpiece. The reasons for this judgment are not hard to find; although the play-goer does not necessarily have to agree with the playwright's ideas about money and poverty and morality, yet he can't help being swept along with the flashing interplay of ideas, the comic dialogue and situations, the unusual contrasting of good and evil. And, in the final analysis, the play is simply interesting, very much so. Is there any more important criterion of literature?

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DRAMA
Tragedy: *Oedipus, Macbeth, Ghosts*
Comedy: *The Rivals, Major Barbara*

Literature Curriculum V
Student Version

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OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

OEDIPUS

Literature Curriculum V
Student Version

STUDENT VERSION

OEDIPUS

The Greek Theater

The origin of drama is lost in prehistoric ritual but the theater as we know it today can be said to have originated in ancient Greece, at least five centuries before the birth of Christ. Try to picture in your mind a hillside overlooking Athens, the capital city of Attica, an ancient Greek state. A large arena, like a round football stadium with rows of seats arranged in circular tiers, is built into the hillside. It is filled to capacity with the citizens of Athens, perhaps as many as 30,000 of them. It is spring, time for the festival of Dionysus and the annual performance in the theater. A hush falls over the crowd as a procession files out into the center of the arena. An actor speaks; another answers; a group begins singing a rhythmic chant and moving in patterns around the arena. The play has begun. The actors, all wearing masks which identify them easily to the members of the audience who are seated too far away to observe facial expressions, speak their lines of dialogue to each other much as the characters in a modern play do, but there is little action. The group, called the chorus, moves back and forth drawing the audience's eyes from one character to another. It speaks in unison, focusing the audience's mind on one issue or idea but remaining apart from the plot itself.

The audience was as engrossed in the action of the play as any audience today, and the dramatic experience was probably much like it is today. But the Greek audience attended the theater for different reasons than we normally do. Certainly, they went to be entertained, but they looked for their enjoyment in a different way than we do today. Greek plays were based on stories familiar to the audience; thus the playgoer was more concerned with technique, with seeing how a story was told, rather than seeing how the plot came out. At the same time the audience was participating in a religious experience, for the plays were presented only once each year at the festival of Dionysus, god of wine and fertility. The audience consequently expected a religious or moral message to be a part of each play.

These plays were first presented as long as twenty-five centuries ago, but some of them have been read and produced over and over again, and imitated and rewritten and studied down through the centuries to the present day. They are still interesting to us today, not as historical documents but as living pieces of literature. Like the ancient Greeks (like all people anywhere, as a matter of fact) we like a good story told well. Greek plays and stories are based on incidents that are still good story material: murder, war, love, revenge. Greek plays use techniques still employed as good dramatic devices: irony, suspense, violence (off stage but often described in vivid detail). In short the Greeks, like us, attended the theater to be entertained, to be moved, to be challenged. And this is what the theater is still all about.

Oedipus the King

The play Oedipus the King tells, as we have said, a story that was familiar to the audience. Because it was, Sophocles was able to begin his play in the middle of the legend. His audience already knew of Oedipus' birth and of the prophecies concerning his destiny. You should be sure to read the introduction to the book, especially "The Legend," pages vii-viii, before you begin to read the play.

The Oracle at Delphi figures prominently in the story of Oedipus. The Oracle was a message from the god Apollo which was delivered by a priestess in the temple at Delphi. The priestess was inspired by breathing sulphurous fumes from a crevice in the ground. It was customary to present a gift to Apollo and then ask the priestess a question. The answer was usually vague and puzzling, but in the incident in our play Creon says specifically that the answer was "in plain terms." Since the audience knew that an earlier prophecy concerning Oedipus had already come true, they were prepared to take all prophecy concerning him seriously.

At the beginning of the story Thebes has been ravaged by the plague and the citizens have come to beg Oedipus, a hero who has saved the city in the past and now the king who is responsible for the city's welfare, to save the city again. The first time the city was in trouble the Sphinx, a monster half beast, half woman, had taken up a position on a rock just outside the city of Thebes and asked every passer-by the riddle: "What being with only one voice, has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?" Those who could not answer were flung to their death from the rock. Oedipus explained the riddle as referring to man in the successive stages of infancy, where he crawls on all fours; maturity, when he walks upright; and old age, when he must walk with a stick. The Sphinx flung herself from the rock upon hearing her riddle answered, and Oedipus was given the throne of Thebes and the hand of the widowed queen. Now, as king, he is asked once again to help save the city.

Structure of the Play

Classical Greek tragedies were performed without intermission of any kind; there are, however, definite structural divisions in the plays since they were composed according to a fairly rigid framework. Oedipus the King, the Greek tragedy you will consider in this unit, is a good example. Its major divisions are the following:

1. Prologue: The introductory scene, in which the background of the story is revealed.

2. Parados: The first entrance of the chorus, singing a song which has to do with the main theme of the play.

3. Episode: Recitative dialogue between actors, with a minor role sometimes played by the chorus. Somewhat resembles a scene in modern plays.

4. Stasimon: Choral songs recited by the chorus at the end of each episode.

5. Exodos: The final action, ended by the exit of all the players as the chorus sings.

Study Questions

Structure

It is not really important that you learn the names of the parts of the classical Greek tragedy. However, it is important that you understand the way in which a play or poem is put together--the structure. Can you see where these five parts are used in Oedipus the King? Look for the Prologue. What is revealed to the audience in the first few minutes of the play? When does this explanation seem to stop and a new part begin? This is the first structural break. Does anything happen in the play to point out the fact that we are moving into a new phase? Does the audience learn anything about the character of Oedipus? Are there hints as to the character of Creon? What else has the author established by the end of this first phase or Prologue?

The second phase, or Parados, is more than just a transition. Sophocles has given his chorus a logical role in the action; they are elders of the city rather than just a group of actors unrelated to the story. Still they do not speak in dialogue as real characters might. What exactly does the chorus do in its first appearance? How is this a part of the telling of the story? Can you tell what the role of the chorus is going to be?

The story moves forward again with the second appearance of Oedipus and his confrontation with Teiresias. What does the audience learn in this scene? Notice that the chorus speaks only in answer to Oedipus throughout this scene until line 452; it takes a direct role in the action. When does it step out of the story again? What does it say then? Why does the speech of the chorus change in character at this point? Has something new entered the story? (Notice who is the first character to appear after the chorus' second speech to the audience.)

The play moves rapidly through a number of Episodes and Stasimons from this point. Can you identify them? Perhaps at this point, you could make a statement about the place of the chorus in the structure of the play. When does it appear? What does it do?

At what point would you say the climax of the play is reached? Compare the speech of the chorus before Oedipus encounters the herdsman and the one after his encounter. What has the herdsman said to make such a difference?

Where does the final phase, or Exodos begin? In many movies and television plays, the final phase is very short. Why is it so long in this play? What happens during this phase? Is it all necessary to the working out of the story?

Summary Questions for Discussion and Composition

Theme

Trying to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of the meaning of Oedipus is difficult. In the 2400 years since the play was written, scholars have debated the meanings of the essential truths with which it deals. Consider the following views presented by critics and evaluate each in light of your own reading of the play.

(a) The play was written to instill respect for religion. Oedipus did not show the proper respect for the gods; he deliberately sought to avoid the prophecy concerning his destiny and he had no respect for Teiresias, the representative of the gods. Therefore, the gods punished him.

(b) The real message of Oedipus is that man must never become confident in his prosperity because the gods can and will destroy it at any time. The gods, from the very beginning, chose Oedipus to drive home the message that man needs modesty in times of success.

(c) Oedipus was written to show that man is not dealt with justly by the gods. Life does not follow the course that men think it will follow or ought to follow. The fact that Oedipus does not deserve his fate is a reflection of what Sophocles observed to be the actual state of affairs.

(d) Oedipus was written to show that man is the ruler of his own life. The strengths and weaknesses of Oedipus determine his fate. Sophocles is not trying to make us feel that angry gods rule the lives of men.

Characterization

One way to arrive at a clearer understanding of the subject of a Greek tragedy is to make a detailed study of the leading character. Develop and prove or disprove each of the following statements by specific reference to lines or incidents from the play:

(a) Oedipus is a tyrant, but a benevolent one who is greatly loved by his people.

(b) Oedipus is not really human. He is too good, too strong; he is portrayed by Sophocles as a kind of god.

(c) Oedipus is a stubborn man, but his stubbornness is portrayed as a virtue.

(d) Oedipus shows his impatience and quick temper in his dealings with Teiresias and Creon.

(e) His basic nobility and strength of character, his complete honesty toward himself and others, mark Oedipus as a truly great man.

(f) Jocasta does not share Oedipus's ability to discover and face the truth.

Aristotle's View of Greek Tragedy

1. In his Poetics, Aristotle (384-433 B.C.) offers insights into the nature of Greek tragedy which should help you to understand Oedipus the King. Aristotle said the purpose of a tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear and thus to produce in the spectators a catharsis (purging) of these emotions. Two widely differing interpretations of how this catharsis operates are popular today: according to one, the spectator, participates vicariously in the actions of the hero and learns through pity and fear that the hero's evil emotions bring self-destruction; according to the other interpretation, the spectator's own emotional conflicts are temporarily forgotten and possibly resolved as a result of his identification with the tragic hero and by the pity and fear he expends on the hero.

First consider which of the above interpretations of catharsis seem more reasonable as applied to this play. Then write a short essay showing how you as a reader-spectator react. Does this play seem to accomplish what Aristotle says is the purpose of a tragedy?

2. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must be a man of high rank in life so that his fall assumes greatness. He must be a man who is basically good, one whose downfall is brought about by some error of judgment or frailty in his character, not by an evil or weak nature. The error or frailty which the Greeks considered the most devastating and most capable of destroying a man was pride, an unfounded confidence in his own powers. How does Oedipus fit this description of the tragic hero? Why are these things important to the nature of the tragic hero? Would it be possible to write a tragedy about an evil man? a common man?

Point of View

1. The traditional religion of Sophocles' Athens was being seriously questioned, as people seemed to be developing more interest in the nature of man than in the nature of the gods. This growing humanism is apparent in Oedipus. Still, Sophocles' point of view reflects the role of the early Greek dramatist, which was to provide his audience with matters for contemplation within a religious framework. How does the essentially religious nature of the Greek drama restrict the point of view of the playwright?

2. What is Sophocles' view regarding the place of fate and free will in the life of Oedipus?

3. What is Oedipus' view of human suffering?

4. How does the use of irony help to clarify the author's point of view? In answering these questions, make reference to as many examples as you can find in Oedipus.

Additional Assignments for Discussion and Composition

(a) Bernard Knox, a classical scholar, calls Oedipus the King a detective story. We discover at the beginning of the play that a murder has been committed; the hero then proceeds to find the murderer. What other qualities of a modern detective story does the play have? In what ways is it different? What effect do the differences have?

(b) Could this play have been written as the tragedy of Jocasta? How would it be changed? Discuss in a short composition.

(c) What elements in the play are related to the kind of theater in which it was presented? What problems did the bare, outdoor stage with a large and distant audience present to the playwright? How did Sophocles overcome them?

(d) The translation you read, like the original play, is written in poetry. The dialogue is not an attempt to recreate conversational speech. What might the author's purpose be in choosing to cast his lines into poetry? What does he gain? What does he lose?

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MACBETH

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STUDENT VERSION

SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH

Introduction

At the end of the tragedy of King Oedipus you probably had mixed feelings about the hero. He was a strong ruler with a deep sense of responsibility to the citizens of Thebes yet he was hot-tempered and unfair in his treatment both of the blind Teiresias and his brother-in-law Creon. He was told by the oracle of the terrible crimes he would be guilty of and yet shortly thereafter he killed a stranger on the highway and married a widowed queen considerably older than himself. He knew his fate in advance, but in trying to escape it actually brought about its fulfillment. Still, when the truth was at last dreadfully clear to him, like a just ruler he punished the offender unflinchingly: himself. We cannot condemn him absolutely, and indeed some readers have found themselves unable to condemn him at all. We pity him. In spite of his errors we sense his tragic nobility, and never more than when he stands before us, self-blinded, at the end of the play.

Now, as you read Shakespeare's Macbeth against this background (as well as against the background of The Tragedy of Julius Caesar read last year), how will you feel about the "hero" of this play? Like Oedipus, although not in such clear terms, he is told something at the beginning about what lies ahead of him: he will be king "hereafter." Yet, although "chance" may crown him king without his "stir," as he says to himself in the third scene of the first act, he kills the good king Duncan and seizes the throne of Scotland by force. Furthermore, he does this with the fullest awareness, as it seems, of "the deep damnation" of Duncan's "taking off." He seems for a while to suffer the agony of remorse, but in spite of it kills the innocent grooms, placing the guilt of the King's murder on them; then he kills his friend Banquo, another good man; and then the defenseless woman Lady Macduff and her young son. Unlike Oedipus, he is not a good ruler: he imposes a reign of terror upon Scotland. "Each new morn," Macduff tells Malcolm in the third scene of the fourth act,

> "New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
> Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
> As if it felt with Scotland and yelled out
> Like syllable of dolor" [a like cry of pain].

What, then, will you feel at the end of the play? As you learned in your study of Oedipus, Aristotle asks us to think of a tragic hero as a great and somehow good man who is "flawed," the tragic "extenuating circumstance" partly accounting for our pity. His punishment is so much greater than his "crime" deserved. Julius Caesar ends with Antony's fine memorial tribute to Brutus, who was also an assassin--Brutus still was "the noblest Roman of them all." At the end of Macbeth we are given only Malcolm's cruel and contemptuous judgment in his reference to "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen." Is it anything but the truth? Could any punishment be in excess of Macbeth's crimes? Is he tragic hero or tragic villain? And if he is a villan can he then be "tragic"? Can the genre name "tragedy" be made to fit both King Oedipus and Macbeth? Do you think this question itself is important? If so, why?

Form and Narrative

The division of plays written in Shakespeare's time into five acts was one of the conventions of the theater of that day, and the form of Shakespeare's plays is often approached almost solely in terms of the five-act convention. However, the act divisions were probably not emphasized when the plays were produced in the Globe theater and there are perhaps more interesting ways of studying the form of Shakespeare's drama. In the Introduction to this year's study of literature, we are reminded that subject, form, and point of view can best be viewed as closely related aspects of the literary work which can be thought of as the three sides of a triangle, and that "the way a thing is said is part of what is being said." Perhaps these ideas can be demonstrated in our study of Macbeth.

Narrative demands form, which is another word for arrangement. "B" follows "A" and is caused by "A", "C" follows "B" as the result of "A" and "B", and on it goes perhaps as far as "Z" ("Z", the final curtain of the alphabet.) A strong and ambitious man wants the throne of Scotland and thinks of assassination to get it; but he also is tormented by conscience and decides against the deed; only to be prodded by his wife into changing his mind again--see the causes operating? He kills the King and then must kill again in order to divert suspicion (cause, motive); then he kills again, as it seems, in order to insure the succession for his own line; and then again, this time in senseless fury (and the cause?). Murder breeds murder. Murder kills not only king and friend and defenseless woman and child but murder kills conscience as well. The hero becomes a hardened criminal. Then comes punishment, prepared south of the border in England by the son of the murdered king, the husband of the murdered wife, and the English King. Could we call the subject of this play, then, Crime and Punishment, Murder and Revenge, Damnation and, for Scotland but not for the hero, Redemption?

In this play the five acts mark the process. Macbeth's mind is made up by the end of Act I (the action moves with great speed). The deed is done in Act II, and the hero tortured by his awareness of the evil of it. Act III, mid-point and the beginning of the counter-movement: here occurs murder of Banquo, the silent accusation of the victim's bloody ghost, and the departure of Macduff for England to join forces with Malcolm. Act IV shows us the ugliest of all the hero's crimes, but at the end of the act the military force is ready to move north from England, and "Macbeth is ripe for shaking." In Act V we get revenge and the redemption of Scotland. In mechanical terms, the middle act (one advantage of the odd number five over the even number four) is the fulcrum. Seesaw: what goes up must come down. A very neat design. But the design of form is contained within the narrative and cannot be thought of apart from it. "The way a thing is said is part of what is being said."

What does the narrative-design suggest to you about the kind of play Macbeth is? King Oedipus also is a crime-and-punishment play. Are there ways in which its narrative-design resembles that of Macbeth? Do you nevertheless feel differently about it? Why?

Macbeth is clearly an evil man who imposes as we have said a reign of terror upon Scotland. Malcolm and Macduff, in the play's second and concluding movement, remove the terror and restore peace in the kingdom. Does not Macbeth, then, have a happy ending? If so, should it really be called a "tragedy"? Should we not rejoice rather than weep at the end? Can there be such a thing as "tragic rejoicing"?

Character and Form

We have been considering dramatic form in terms of sequence, a succession of events arranged according to a principle of cause and effect. The treatment of character by the playwright can be thought of as another aspect of form.

Let us explore that statement a bit. Drama, like any other storied form, has as its essential characteristic some sort of conflict. Conflict can occur in many ways. In Shakespeare's tragedies the conflict is often physical, expressing itself in duels and battles. But conflict can also occur on the psychological level, which is in many ways a more interesting area. The conflict between characters with different motives and different temperaments can be as violent and deadly as any duel. Consider the clash between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act I, scene 7 (and compare the word battles between Oedipus and Teiresias or Oedipus and Creon).

> Macbeth: We will proceed no further in this business ...
> Lady M: Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?...
> ...Art thou afeard?...
> Macbeth: Prithee, peace!
> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none.
> Lady M: What beast was't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?

Drama is dialogue, and dialogue is the form of psychological conflict. Although "just words," this is as terrible a battle as that between Macduff and Macbeth at the end of the play.

Conflict can also take the shape of contrast. As you read the play, compare Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and see how much contrast you can find. Macbeth is imaginitive and deeply emotional; his wife seems only to see what is before her. Until the last act she seems to have her emotions and her conscience under firm control, and is unable to follow Macbeth's flights of fancy. Consider: Macbeth sees a ghost; Lady Macbeth sees a stool. Macbeth says "Methought I heard a voice cry 'sleep no more! Macbeth doth murder sleep'" and she says "What do you mean?" Macbeth thinks metaphorically that his bloody hand will dye all the seas red; Lady Macbeth thinks "a little water clears us of this deed." It is in such ways that Shakespeare makes the dialogue, which is the form of drama, the vehicle for psychological contrast and conflict. It can be suggested then that character is one part of the play's subject. If the way a thing is said is part of what is being said, then subject and form are unified through dialogue.

These simple observations will suggest many questions which you will wish to discuss in class; and raising such questions and trying to deal with them (many of them will not have clear answers) will sharpen your interest in the play.

Further Suggestions

We have said that Macbeth is imaginative and eloquent and that in the first part of the play he has a highly active conscience. But how well do you think he really understands himself and his situation? In his soliloquy at the beginning of the seventh scene of the first act he seems to know that the murder will be the most horrible of crimes and seems also to know exactly what the results will be (Duncan's "virtues will plead like angels. . . against the deep damnation of his taking off"). Why then does he go on with it? Is it possible to "know" something and at the same time not really to know it? Can man learn only through bitter experience?

What contradictions are there in his character? What does it mean to say he is both a brave soldier and a coward? What is the difference between his kind of strength and his wife's kind of strength? The play in different ways tells us that there is love between them. In the midst of blood and murder they have many tender moments. How do you think there can be love between two people so apparently unlike? Or are they perhaps, beneath the appearances, deeply alike? In any case, do you think it is believable that such a great crime could issue from such "great love"?

And we may ask about Lady Macbeth the same question we have asked about her husband--how well does she understand herself really? What is the significance of her saying, "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't"? And at the end, what really is the nature of the punishment that comes to both of them--is it the suicide of the Queen and the killing of the King, or is it punishment of a deeper kind? Read again his speech (Act V, scene 3) beginning "I have lived long enough." What is the significance of Macbeth's saying, after hearing the cry of women offstage signalizing the death of the Queen, "The time has been my senses would have cooled / To hear a night-skriek"? Do you feel pity of any kind for "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen"?

In discussing King Oedipus you probably came upon the problem of irony and how irony is made to work in that play. In what different forms does it appear in Macbeth? Sometimes of course it is very obvious, as in the exchange between Macbeth and Banquo before the latter's murder:

Macbeth. Fail not our feast.
Banquo. My lord, I will not.

There is an irony of plot in King Oedipus, sometimes called "dramatic irony": what happens to the hero at the end is the opposite of what he intended at the beginning, giving a double meaning to many of the speeches in the first part of the play. Is there this kind of irony in Macbeth? Where? How does Shakespeare use the convention of the dramatic form which we call "dramatic irony"?

There will be questions about the witches--do they have any important part in determining ("causing") what happens in the play? Compare them with the oracle in Oedipus. Do you think Shakespeare was using a convention? What do the oracle and the witches have to do with the problem of fate and free will?

Consider the imagery of the play. What effect has the play's language on you--the recurrences of blood, bells, birds, beasts, insects ("O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!"), armor, swords, daggers, night? How many times do the words man and manhood occur and with what deepening effect? Why the constant play on sleep? On night and day contrasts? On the confusion of opposites ("foul is fair")?

How if you were directing the play would you handle the problem of lighting? Of costume? Of pace? How many curtain drops or intermissions would you arrange, and where would you place them? And what of the poetry itself--that aspect of the play's form? Can you find ways of explaining its power? How should it be spoken on the stage?

Finally, it is important to remind you again that for many of these questions there can be no one right answer, as there is to a problem in mathematics; and to remember also that the one important purpose of such questions is to improve our understanding and therefore to increase our enjoyment of Shakespeare's play.

STUDENT VERSION

GHOSTS

by

Henrik Ibsen

The play you are about to read, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, has been called a modern tragedy; it offers you the opportunity to compare it with the other plays in this genre, *Oedipus* and *Macbeth*, which you have already studied this year. After you have discussed the play, you will find yourself on one of two sides: you will have redefined tragedy as a genre with changing dimensions in changing times, or you will question the application of the term "tragedy" to *Ghosts* and thus possibly to other plays whose protagonists are the products as well as the victims of modern society. Your decision in either case should be a reasoned one, based not on rigidity of definition as much as on your own intelligent consideration of the problems involved.

The first obvious problem derives from the position of the common man in today's world and our natural interest in him as a representative of ourselves. Kings and queens we are not. Does nobility of character lose its validity when nobility of birth ceases to excite us?

A second problem arises when we consider whether modern man is just a product or indeed a victim of his institutions, his habits, and his beliefs. The question of free will versus determinism has new dimensions in our post-Darwinian world.

The third problem carries us away from the specific art form of drama to the eternal question, "What is man?" Is he master of his fate? Can he be? Ought he to be? In connection with this philosophical question, you might ponder whether tragedy as you finally define it is optimistic about man, or pessimistic. Perhaps tragedy requires an ingredient of the spirit that our idea of "progress" has altered beyond recognition.

Read *Ghosts* with a double purpose. Observe the tightly constructed development, the economy of Ibsen's motives; this is a play with a simple intention. Secondly, make yourself imaginatively a part of the society this play portrays and try to judge the characters as nearly on their own terms (and Ibsen's) as you can. You might begin by grouping the characters:

Engstrand
Regina, his daughter
Manders
Mrs. Alving
Osvald, her son

Although these relationships are accepted by all as true, Regina suspects them, Engstrand thinks he knows the truth about them, and Mrs. Alving knows what they are in fact.

1. What "inciting cause" or immediate necessity brings these five characters together at the time the action of the play occurs?

The truth of the family relationships is gradually revealed because the hopes, the needs, the fears, and the beliefs of the five characters come into conflict.

2. What does Regina want and how does she plan to get it?

3. What does Engstrand want and how does he plan to achieve it?

4. What does Mrs. Alving want for herself? For Osvald?

5. What does Osvald want?

6. How does it happen that Manders is involved with the Engstrand and Alving families?

Manders precipitates the play's revelations even though he is outside both families.

7. How does Manders defend his moral attitude to each of the following:

   a) the books Mrs. Alving is reading
   b) his sympathy for Engstrand
   c) Engstrand's need for Regina
   d) the decision not to insure the Orphanage
   e) the impropriety of the "free" life abroad described by Osvald
   f) the application of a double standard to sexual behavior
   g) his refusal to shelter Mrs. Alving when she ran away from her husband
   h) his criticism of Mrs. Alving as a mother
   i) his reaction to Engstrand's lie about Regina's parentage

8. How does the expression of these attitudes work upon the other characters in the play to precipitate Mrs. Alving's revelation of the truth?

9. In terms of stage action and action that took place before the play begins, how does Ghosts compare with Oedipus?

10. Is the presence of Engstrand and Regina in the play for purposes of contrast and development, or to emphasize Ibsen's intention? A combination of some of these?

The major theme of Ghosts, the theme that gives the play its name, is two-fold. It appears explicitly in Act 2, in Mrs. Alving's speech on page 61. This speech contains a dramatic irony toward which Ibsen has been moving throughout the play. Recall Manders' "Is everything going well out here?" (page 28); Mrs. Alving's "I know someone who's kept both his soul and body unharmed," (page 39); and Mrs. Alving's "Then this hideous farce will be over," (page 54). The piling of irony upon irony recalls Oedipus, or should. Look at what immediately precedes and follows Mrs. Alving's "theme" speech.

11. What is it that Mrs. Alving calls cowardice and Manders calls duty? (page 59)

12. Has Mrs. Alving been able to act upon her belief that "it was just chain-stitch"? (page 62)

13. What are the ghosts of which Mrs. Alving is so conscious in the speech on page 61?

14. Explain why what Manders calls a victory Mrs. Alving calls a crime. (page 62)

15. What further dramatic irony is present when Mrs. Alving says, "Well, well, well, don't let's talk any more about the old days"? What final ironies are yet to come?

The sense of release Mrs. Alving feels after disburdening herself of the truth she has hidden all these years lasts through Act 2. The notes to your text, however, call our attention to Osvald's irritation at the gloomy northern climate (page 71). There are other earlier references to light and dark; it is interesting to compare the light-dark imagery here with that of Oedipus, for in both plays there seems to be a definite relation between the imagery and the irony of the characters' ignorance of the truth.

16. With what do Mrs. Alving and Osvald, each in his own way, equate light and sunshine?

17. How are the meanings of light and dark expanded in the various references to "fire" from "that fire is a judgment" (page 84) to the end of the play?

18. How significant in terms of the light-dark imagery is Manders' remark, "But I'm sure I don't remember having a candle in my hand" (page 86)?

Mrs. Alving, who has been prevented on two earlier occasions, finally gets an opportunity to respond to Osvald's statement about the joy of living.

19. What does her response represent? A new insight? A straw at which she grasps to hold her son? A metaphor to avoid an ugly truth?

20. When Osvald says "I don't see that it can really matter so much to me" (page 95), are we to believe that he does not really understand the truth about the source of his disease?

21. Why is Osvald unable to accept the explanation of "what his father was" as Mrs. Alving had intended him to? Because she furnished reasons for Regina's departure? Because he carries the "ghosts" idea to an even more logical conclusion than his mother? Because the disease is already taking its toll?

22. The crowning irony of the play begins at the bottom of page 96. What do you make of Osvald's admission that he has inherited the disease? Is this an intentional cruelty to his mother? Has he known all the time?

23. Did Mrs. Alving give Osvald the over-dose of morphine?

Suggestions for a written assignment

There is always a tendency, when you study literature in "unit" forms, to keep each unit separate. This year, however, it has been the intention of the drama units to help you develop a real comprehension of what the term "tragedy" means. After reviewing the three plays Oedipus, Macbeth, and Ghosts, choose one of the topics below for a carefully considered paper.

1. If Ghosts has a tragic protagonist, who is it, and for what reasons?

2. Is the common man an apt subject for tragedy?

3. What explains tragedy as you define it: man's free will, or his control by a determining force outside himself?

4. Is there room in a definition of tragedy for both an optimistic and a pessimistic view of man?

5. In Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, which is to any discussion of modern tragedy what Oedipus is to classical tragedy, Biff says of his suicide father, "He never knew who he was." Does the tragic protagonist require the awareness of his dilemma that Aristotle calls "recognition"?

6. Many modern plays, including those referred to as part of the "theatre of the absurd," examine man's place in the modern world. Here are a few titles: Brecht's Mother Courage, Beckett's Waiting for Godot, MacLeish's J.B., and Durenmatt's The Visit. Your teacher can recommend many more. Read one of these plays. Does the play you have read re-define or expand the meaning of tragedy, or is tragedy "dead"?

Student Version

The Rivals

by

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

I. Introduction

The Rivals, Sheridan's entertaining comedy of manners, is one of the few 18th century plays still popular. You might, therefore, try to decide for yourself what explains this continued popularity. One of the possible explanations is the absurd language of Mrs. Malaprop, who can, for example, speak of having put "Sir Anthony's preposition" of marriage before her niece Lydia Languish (p. 45). Sheridan also seems to have struck in The Rivals a fortunate balance between the excessively moral plays and the ridiculously sentimental plays which were standard theatrical fare for the 18th century. Although modern readers don't care for either of these types, they still seem to appreciate Sheridan's light touch in The Rivals, which contains no thundering moral and even has some sly jabs at overly sentimental posturing. A third reason for its popularity is that The Rivals is a classic example of what is called a "comedy of manners."

It is this last reason which should serve as a further guide to your reading. From your study of Oedipus, Macbeth, and Ghosts, you should be quite familiar with tragedy. Now, as you read The Rivals, you should consciously attempt to see just what it is that makes this play a comedy. As you try to analyze the comic features, you should find your experience with television and movie comedies helpful because many of them use the same comic situations which you'll find in The Rivals. Just as nine out of ten family comedies contain scheming lovers who have to fool someone, The Rivals starts with the same stock situation. Once you finish reading the play and considering the discussion questions, you should be able to formulate a working definition of comedy in general and of a comedy of manners in particular.

Though much of the comic material in The Rivals is familiar, the play may not be particularly easy to read. You may even find it somewhat less interesting than the tragedies because comedy dates or ages much more rapidly than tragedy does. For instance, while the overall situations in The Rivals are common to any age, the many witty comments and allusions may be obscure. How many of you know that Bath was a fashionable resort in 18th century England or that 18th century females used scraps of paper when they rolled their hair (p. 10)? Yet without knowing these and similar facts, you may fail to see the humor in some parts of the play. A related reason for difficulty is that a comedy is always hard to read because much of its humor comes from the mannerisms and appearances of the characters. Therefore, you, as a reader, will have to use liberal amounts of imagination if you with to experience the enjoyment which even a modern audience would gain from viewing the play.

Although the introductory material in the text is valuable, probably the best way to read The Rivals is to proceed directly to the play (p. 1), skipping even Sheridan's two prologues. Once you finish the play itself, you can then consult the other material, especially Alan S. Downer's fine introductory essay (pp. v-x).

II. Discussion Questions

Theme

1. What fundamental pursuit or interest is the basis for almost all that happens in the play?

2. How would you contrast Lydia's view of love with Captain Absolute's view?

3. How would you characterize Faulkland's love for Julia Melville? How does their relationship comment on the one between Lydia and Ensign Beverley (Captain Absolute)?

4. How many of the incidents revolve around some form of deceit or ignorance? Is this a stock situation in comedy? Explain your answer by referring to modern comedies.

5. What moral does Mrs. Bulkley on pp. 97-98 draw from The Rivals? How well does this moral fit the play? Do you think Sheridan seriously intended the play to have a moral? Explain.

Point of View

6. In what ways does Sheridan satirize the romantic notions of the main characters? Can you identify Sheridan's probable view of the proper nature of love?

7. In what ways do all of the characters, even the servants, become vehicles for Sheridan's satire? How many of the characters would you identify as stock comic characters?

8. As with most literary terms, satire covers a broad range of situations; it may be bitter and personal or it may be so mild and gentle that it could give offense to no one. Can you think of examples of both extremes of satire? How would you classify Sheridan's satire?

9. What does your classification of Sheridan's satire tell you about Sheridan's intended moral or theme? (See question 5.)

Form

10. Usually plot is defined as the basic conflict from which all the action arises. What is the plot of The Rivals?

11. Which characters could be considered as blocking the actions of the main characters? How is the defeat of these blocking characters softened at the end of the play? Does this softening usually occur in comedies? Explain.

12. If the climax is defined as the shift in power from the blocking characters to the hero or protagonist, where in this play would you locate the climax?

13. Irony is often classified as either verbal or situational. What are some of the main examples of each type in The Rivals? Which irony is the more sophisticated and, hence, more difficult?

14. Using your knowledge about both The Rivals and modern comedies, formulate a general definition of comedy. How broad and inclusive is your definition? Is it as useful as your definition of tragedy?

15. Can you explain why The Rivals is specifically called a comedy of manners? What type of modern play or movie could be called a comedy of manners? Can you think of any specific examples?

III. Projects and Writing Assignments

1. In a short composition, develop a basic definition of comedy. Use examples from The Rivals.

2. When you studied tragedy earlier this year, you were asked to consider the powerful emotional catharsis which occurs when the audience becomes involved in watching a tragedy. How would you characterize the usual or expected audience response to comedy? Does comedy depend upon a plot with a powerful climax? To what extent could comedy be called episodic in structure? Write a short composition answering these questions and using The Rivals as your proof.

3. Pick one type of stock comic character and present an analysis of it, using as many concrete examples from The Rivals or from modern comedies as you are familiar with. For example, you might choose the irate father (Sir Anthony Absolute?) or the meddling female relative (Mrs. Malaprop?)

4. Try writing a satiric skit about school life or school personalities. How bitter and biting should such a skit be if it is to be suitable for a student- un assembly?

5. Pick some local incident or some well-known personality and write a short satiric article. If your local newspaper carries Art Buchwald's column, use his approach as a model.

6. If you liked The Rivals, you might like to read Sheridan's other famous play, The School for Scandal. Another outstanding 18th century comedy is Oliver Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer.

7. How satiric are most television comedies? Answer this question in a short composition, being careful to prove your position by reference to specific shows. See if you can explain why television uses the type of satire it does.

STUDENT VERSION

MAJOR BARBARA

by

George Bernard Shaw

How to Read a Play

A wise and successful professor of literature insists that his students read every play they study not once, or twice, but five times, on the assumption that familiarity may foster deeper understanding than a single reading can afford. Modern drama lends itself to multiple readings because, in many cases, of its relative brevity and its current language. There can be no real argument against the professor's statement if you, the student, hope to thoroughly know the play you are studying. Your class will find it profitable to agree in advance on your method of approach to Shaw's Major Barbara.

The section below on Shaw as a man of ideas offers some introductory statements which may be helpful. The discussion questions that follow will stimulate your responses to the play, particularly if everyone in the class has read it at least once. A number of the questions are capable of considerable development, and you may decide with your teacher to use them for written assignments. Those questions are marked with an asterisk (*).

Shaw, a Man of Ideas

Very few playwrights go to the lengths of George Bernard Shaw to explain what their plays mean. Shaw furnished prefaces to his major plays, expansions of his thought; one of these (to Androcles and the Lion) is more than twice as long as the play itself. These prefaces certainly were not furnished to the theatre audience; that Shaw wrote them and was, in fact, seemingly reluctant to bring any of them to a conclusion, hints broadly that he intended to leave no stone unturned, no possibility that his thought would be midunderstood. Here is a sampling of the typical, provocative Shaw, firing his salvos at our comfortable defenses. You will glimpse the extent of his concerns, perhaps be lured into reading other of his plays when you have finished Major Barbara.

From the preface to Saint Joan:

"We have not even the excuse of getting some fun out of our prisons as the Middle Ages did out of their stakes and wheels and gibbets."

From the Epistle Dedicatory to Man and Superman:

"As a result, Man is no longer, like Don Juan, victor in the duel of sex. Whether he has ever really been may be doubted: at all events the enormous superiority of Woman's natural position in this matter is telling with greater and greater force."

From the preface to Androcles and the Lion:

> "The notion that he (Jesus) was shedding his blood in order that every petty cheat and adulterator and libertine might wallow in it and come out whiter than snow, cannot be imputed to him on his own authority. 'I come as an infallible patent medicine for bad consciences' is not one of the sayings in the gospels."

From the prologue to Caesar and Cleopatra, spoken by the god Ra to the audience:

> "Ye cannot kneel nor prostrate yourselves; for ye are packed in rows without freedom to move, obstructing one another's vision; neither do any of ye regard it as seemly to do aught until ye see all the rest do so too; wherefore it commonly happens that in great emergencies ye do nothing though each telleth his fellow that something must be done."

From the preface to Major Barbara:

> "Captain Kidd would have marooned a modern Trust magnate for conduct unworthy of a gentleman of fortune."

What is Shaw? A teacher-philosopher, using the drama as his vehicle? Or is he a dramatist first? He is certainly a gadfly. Is he an iconoclast, or is he an idealist? However you eventually answer these questions, you cannot escape the ideas, nor can you deny that his plays, as plays, are absorbing, amusing, and original. Probably Shaw recognized that few people wanted to examine his ideas in depth as long as his characters were fascinating and their conflicts dramatically satisfying. Audiences being human, and Shaw being what he was, the prefaces represent a satirist's attempt, pre-doomed, to do the satirist's job--change human behavior.

Ernst Cassirir offers a reason for the failure of satire to achieve its ends when he says, "Contradiction is at the heart of human existence." Inner contradiction. Man wants to be regarded as good, kind, unselfish, moral, sensible, honorable, and above all, rational; but man is governed to a large extent by his irrational or emotional nature. He does not want to lead the "examined life." Is it to be wondered at, then, that the audience a satirist attacks (and Shaw was always on the attack) prefers to be entertained instead of coming to grips with the truth about themselves? Humanity is constantly at odds with its own nature. The audience who heard Ra in the prologue to Caesar and Cleopatra consisted of the victims, the target at which Shaw the satirist aimed.

And so he shocks, startles, and confuses us. With a breeziness, with a colossal disrespect for our favorite assumptions, he bombards us with concrete challenges that only the very honest individual can face up to. Even honesty is not enough; Shaw, as you will see, has no easy answers, and this leaves you, if you are a thoughtful reader, out where it is less important to find answers than to be willing to examine the questions.

Questions for Discussion--Act One

You are by now able to recognize immediately the theatrical convention of the expository opening. In Major Barbara, the exposition is presented in typical "drawing room comedy" fashion.

1. How does Shaw let us know who the important characters in the play will be?

2. How does he modify our possible approval of Lady Britomart and Stephen?

The verbal exchange that begins at the bottom of page 71 is called stychomythia. Because you have read the play, you recognize this exchange as the dual challenge that makes the rest of the play's action possible.

3. What does morality consist of, according to Lady Brit?

4. How does Lady Brit's version of her husband's activities and motives compare with these motives as Undershaft explains them?

5. Why does Undershaft laugh when Stephen says the distinction between right and wrong is clear?

6. What is Undershaft's morality insofar as it can be discovered in Act One?

A useful and not really very tedious preparation for discussing the conflicting ideas in Major Barbara is a chart of the statements showing the attitudes and beliefs of the major characters. This kind of study has the further advantage of helping you to keep the discussion firmly anchored to Shaw. Your teacher will give you opportunity to take issue with him, a course you will not wish to embark on until you clearly know what the issues are!

Questions for Discussion--Act Two

This act opens with a dramatic plunge out of the drawing room atmosphere into the seamy existence of the working class. Keep in mind Shaw's interest in socialism as Snobby, Rummy, and Bill reveal another set of attitudes toward "morality."

7. What moral choice of Snobby's accounts for his always being fired first?

8. How does Rummy rationalize her moral position in regard to the Salvation Army?

9. What accounts for the realism or lack of realism in Mr. Shirley's morality as it compares with Snobby's and Rummy's?

10. Consider Bill's solution (page 91) to Barbara's probing of his behavior. Would Undershaft (who is silent during this conversation) approve or disapprove of Bill?

11. To what extent does Cusins' translation of Euripides constitute a clear moral stand?

Shaw can sometimes be very exasperating: just as his characters are on the verge of making something very clear to us, the dialogue takes off in another direction. For instance, note that Cusins, who "sooner or later" gets anything he feels he must have, has no plan to change Barbara.

12. Why does Undershaft say (page 95) "You are a young man after my own heart" when he has just said (page 94) that money and power are necessary for happiness?

13. Although Undershaft "resumes his equanimity" after implying that he, Cusins, and Barbara are all mad, what do the hopes and desires of these three, mad or sane, add up to?

14. On page 71 Undershaft clearly implies something about the charity of the wealthy; on page 98 (top) he expresses a hope for the future. In the light of these ideas, what does the exchange between Undershaft and Cusins on page 98 signify? Is Undershaft sincere or sarcastic?

The return of Bill Walker after his failure to get his jaw broken is an interesting device on Shaw's part. After all, Todger and Mog did not have to be converts or try to convert Bill.

15. For what dramatic reasons does Bill reappear?

16. In the exchange between Mrs. Baines and Barbara's father (page 104), why does Undershaft gleam "with approval of their method"?

17. What does Bill's "what price slavation now" reveal about the role of the Salvation Army in society?

18. What is Undershaft's motive (page 108) when he gives Mrs. Baines the check "to hasten my own commercial ruin"? How serious is he? Would this scene be clear to you without the stage directions?

On page 111 a climax of ironic cross-purposes is reached:

Jenny: Glory Hallelujah!
Undershaft: My ducats and my daughter!
Cusins: Money and gunpowder!
Barbara: Drunkenness and murder! My God: why hast thou forsaken me?
Bill: Wot prawce selvytion nah?

19. Why doesn't Shaw end the act here? Should he have done so?

Questions for Discussion--Act Three

Act Three opens with Barbara calm and Cusins nursing a hangover; otherwise the scene is, under the circumstances, almost a parody of the one with which the play opens.

20. What is the purpose of this scene (up to the mass exodus to Perivale St. Andrews)?

21. Beginning with the idea (page 120) that schooling weakens a man by drilling and disciplining him into morality, complete and revise your chart on Undershaft. What are the main statements of Undershaft's creed now?

22. Is there evidence in the play that the idea mentioned in question 21 is true? Where?

23. Explain to your own satisfaction why Undershaft insists that he has a religion.

24. What does the chart on Undershaft reveal to you about Shaw's satiric intentions in this play?

25. Read Undershaft's long speech on page 131. What support does it give to Cusins' calling Undershaft "the Prince of Darkness"?

26. In the light of Undershaft's statement on page 133, "I belong to it," would you expect Lady Brit and Undershaft to agree or disagree on the cynical overtones of the motto around the dome of the Labor Church?

27. Cusins asks (page 138) "What about the moral question?" Along what lines is the final argument in the play drawn up?

28. How completely do Undershaft's arguments provide an answer to Cusins' dilemma?

29. Of what significance is Undershaft's statement on page 147, "Dare you make war on war?"

30. How does Cusins rationalize his acceptance of the munition works?

31. With whose philosophy is Barbara's "Let God's work be done for its own sake" (page 152) most compatible, Cusins or Undershaft's? How does this new view compare with Barbara's motives as revealed in Act Two?

32. Just what goals have Cusins and Barbara set for themselves when the play ends?

33. If this play has a hero or a heroine, who is it? Consider what changes took place in the character and in what direction; what or who caused these changes to occur; whose values are the most consistent and admirable?

General Questions

34. Considering the stature of this play and the weight given to the various arguments in it, is the title apt?

35. If you were to stage this play, where would the problems of dramatic forward motion be found?

36. Read the Preface. Which is the better argument, the preface or the play? For what audience?

37. Shaw's play was first produced in 1905. In the light of present-day society, how successful is Shaw as a reformer of human nature?

38. Why is comedy-satire a better vehicle for Shaw than tragedy?